THREE FRENCH MORALISTS

EDMUND GOSSE

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THREE FRENCH MORALISTS

AND THE GALLANTRY OF FRANCE

BY

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TO

LORD RIBBLESDALE

This little book, long the subject of my meditation, suddenly began to take shape one Sunday morning when I was your guest at Gisburne. We were actually starting for church, and the car was at the door, when I announced to you that the spirit moved me to stay behind. "Very well, then," you said, with your habitual good-nature, "we leave you to your folios." My "folios" were the three volumes of one of the smallest of books, the 18mo edition of Vauvenargues published by Plon in 1874. In the midst of a violent thunderstorm, which was like a declaration of war upon your golden Yorkshire summer, I wrote my first pages, and you were so sceptical, when you came back, as to my having done anything but watch the lightning, that I told you you would have to endure the responsibility of being sponsor to a work thus suddenly begun in all the agitation of the elements. So, such as time has proved it, here it is.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

THE object of these essays is to trace back to its source, or to some of its sources—for the soul of France is far too complex to be measured by one system—the spirit of gallantry which inspired the young French officers at the beginning of the war. We cannot examine too minutely, or with too reverent an enthusiasm, the effort of our great ally, and in this theme for our admiration there are many strains, some of which present themselves in apparent opposition to one another. The war has now lasted so long, and has so completely altered its character, that what was true of the temper of the soldiers of France in November 1914 is no longer true in April 1918. Confidence and determination are still there, there is no diminution in domestic intensity or in patriotic fervour, but the long continuance of the struggle has modified the temper of the French officer, and it will probably never be again what it was in the stress and tempest of sacrifice three years and a half ago, when the young French soldiers, flushed with the idealisms which they had imbibed at St. Cyr, rushed to battle like paladins, "with a pure heart," in the rapture of chivalry and duty.

All that has long been wearied out, and might even be forgotten, if the letters and journals of a great cloud of witnesses were not fortunately extant. The record kept by the friends of Paul Lintier and those others whom I am presently to mention, and by innumerable persons to whose memory justice cannot here be done, will keep fresh in the history of France the idealism of a splendid generation. Now we see, and for a long time past have seen, a different attitude on the fields of Champagne and Picardy. There is no feather worn now in the cap, no white gloves grasp the sword; the Saint Cyrian elegance is over and done with. There is no longer any declamation, any emphasis, any attaching of importance to "form" or rhetoric. The fervour and the emotion are there still, but they are kept in reserve, they are below the surface, "at the bottom of the heart," as La Rochefoucauld puts it.

Heroism is now restrained by a sense of the prodigious length and breadth of the contest, by the fact, at last patent to the most unthinking, that the war is an octopus which has wound its tentacles about every limb and every organ of the vitality of France. A revelation of the overwhelming violence of enormous masses of men has broken down the tradition of chivalry. War is now accepted with a sort of indifference, as a part of the day's work; "pas de grands mots, pas de grands gestes, pas de drame!" The imperturbable French officer of 1918 attaches no particular importance to his individual

gesture. He concentrates his energy in another kind of action.

But the French race is by nature bellicose and amorous of adventure, and more than all other nations has a tendency to clothe its patrimonial ardour of defence in beautiful terms and gallant attitudes. This is one of the points on which the British race, with its scrupulous reserve, often almost its affectation of self-depreciating shyness, differs most widely from the French, and is most in need of sympathetic imagination in dealing with a noble ally whose methods are not necessarily the same as ours. It is difficult to fancy a young English lieutenant quoting with rapturous approval, as Pierre de Rozières and Henri Lagrange did in August 1914, the counsels which were given more than a hundred years ago by the Prince de Ligne: "Let your brain swim with enthusiasm! Let honour electrify your heart! Let the holy flame of victory shine in your eyes! as you hoist the glorious ensigns of renown let your souls be in like measure uplifted!" A perpetual delirium or intoxication is the state of mind which is recommended by this "heart of fire," as the only one becoming in a French officer who has taken up arms to defend his country.

For the young men who consciously adopted the maxims of the Prince de Ligne as their guide at the opening of this war, M. Maurice Barrès has found the name of "Traditionalists." They are those who followed the tradition of the soldierly

spirit of France in its three main lines, in its individualism, in its intelligence, in its enthusiasm. They endeavoured, in those first months of agony and hope, to model their conduct on the formulas which their ancestors, the great moralists of the past, had laid down for them. Henri Lagrange, who fell at Montereau in October 1915, at the age of twenty, was a type of hundreds of others. This is how his temper of mind, as a soldier, is described by his friend Maxime Brienne :—

" The confidence of Lagrange was no less extraordinary than was his spirit of sacrifice. He possessed the superhuman severity which comes from being wholly consecrated to duty. . . . With a magnificent combination of logic and of violence, with a resolution to which his unusually lucid intelligence added a sort of methodical vehemence, he expressed his conviction that resolute sacrifice was necessary if the result was to be a definite success. . . . He declared that a soldier who, by force of mind and a sentiment of honour and patriotism, was able to conquer the instinct of fear, should not merely " fulfil " his military duty with firmness, but should hurl himself on death, because it was only at that price that success could be obtained over a numerical majority."

This is a revelation of that individualism which is characteristic of the trained French character, a quality which, though partly obscured by the turn the great struggle has taken, will undoubtedly survive and ultimately reappear. It is derived

from the admonitions of a series of moral teachers, and in the wonderful letters which M. Maurice Barrès has brought together with no less tact than passion in his series of volumes issued under the general title of "L'Âme Française et la Guerre," we have an opportunity of studying it in a great variety of situations. This is but a portion, and it may be but a small portion, of the multiform energy of France, and it is capable, of course, of being subjected to criticism. That, in fact, it has had to endure, but it is no part of my business here, nor, if I may venture to say so, is it the business of any Englishman to criticise at any time, except in pathetic admiration, an attitude so beautiful, and marked in its self-sacrifice by so delicate an effusion of scrupulous good taste. We are in presence of a field of those fluttering tricolor flags which fill the eyes of a wanderer over the battle-centres of the Marne with a passion of tears. We are in presence of the memorials of a chivalry that did not count the price, but died "joyfully" for France.[1]

There is not much advantage in searching for the germs of all this exalted sentiment earlier than the middle of the seventeenth century. The malady of the Fronde was serious precisely because it revealed the complete absence, in the nobles, in the clergy, in the common people, of patriotic con-

[1] The poet Léon Guillot, in dying, bid his comrades describe him to his father and mother as "tombé au champ d'honneur et mort *joyeusement* pour son pays."—"Les Diverses Familles Spirituelles de la France," pp. 178, 179.

viction of any kind. Cardinal's men and anti-cardinalists, Mazarin and Monsieur, Condé and Plessis-Praslin,—we follow the bewildering turns of their fortune and the senseless evolution of their mercenaries, without being able to trace any moral line of conduct, any ethical aim on the part of the one or the other. It was anarchy for the sheer fun of anarchy's sake, a struggle which pervaded the nation without ever contriving to be national, a riot of forces directed by no intellectual or ethical purpose whatever. The delirium of it all reached a culminating point in 1652 when the aristocratic bolshevists of Condé's army routed the victorious king and cardinal at the Faubourg St. Antoine. This was the consummation of tragical absurdity; what might pass muster for political reason had turned inside out; and when Mazarin fled to Sedan he left behind him a France which was morally, religiously, intellectually, a sucked orange.

Out of the empty welter of the Fronde there grew with surprising rapidity the conception of a central and united polity of France which has gone on advancing and developing, and, in spite of outrageous revolutionary earthquakes, persisting ever since. We find La Rochefoucauld, as a moral teacher, with his sardonic smile, actually escaping out of the senseless conflict, and starting, with the stigmata of the scuffle still on his body, a surprising new theory that the things of the soul alone matter, and that love of honour is the first of the moral virtues. We see him, the cynic and sensual brawler

of 1640, turned within a few years into a model of regularity, the anarchist changed into a serious citizen with a logical scheme of conduct, the atheistical swash-buckler become the companion of saints and pitching his tent under the shadow of Port Royal. More than do the purely religious teachers, he marks the rapid crystallization of society in Paris, and the opening of a new age of reflection, of polish and of philosophical experiment. Moral psychology, a science in which Frenchmen have ever since delighted, seems to begin with the stern analysis of *amour-propre* in the " Maximes."

It is obvious that my choice of three moral maxim-writers to exemplify the sources of modern French sentiment must be in some measure an arbitrary one. The moralists of the end of the seventeenth century in France are legion, and I would not have it supposed that I am not aware of the relative importance of some of them. But although La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère were not the inventors of their respective methods of writing, nor positively isolated in their treatment of social themes, I do not think it is claiming too much for them to say that in the crowd of smaller figures they stand out large, and with each generation larger, in any survey of their century. In their own day, Cureau de la Chambre, Coëffeteau and Senault were considered the first of moral philosophers, but there must be few who turn over the pages of the " Usages des Passions " now, whereas the " Caractères " enjoys a perpetual popularity.

The writers whom I have just named are dead, at least I presume so, for I must not profess to have done more than touch their winding-sheets in the course of my private reading. But there are two moralists of the period who remain alive, and one of whom burns with an incomparable vivacity of life. If I am asked why Pascal and Nicole have not been chosen among my types, I can only answer that Pascal, unlike my select three, has been studied so abundantly in England that by nothing short of an exhaustive monograph can an English critic now hope to add much to public apprehension of his qualities. The case of Nicole is different. Excessively read in France, particularly during the eighteenth century, and active always in influencing the national conscience—since the actual circulation of the "Essais de Morale" is said to have far exceeded that of the "Pensées" of Pascal—Nicole has never, in the accepted phrase, "contrived to cross the Channel," and he is scarcely known in England. Books and their writers have these fates. Mme de Sevigné was so much in love with the works of Nicole, that she expressed a wish to make "a soup of them and swallow it"; but I leave her to the enjoyment of the dainty dish. As theologians, too, both Pascal and Nicole stand somewhat outside my circle.

The three whom I have chosen stand out among the other moralists of France by their adoption of the maxim as their mode of instruction. When La Bruyère, distracted with misgivings about his

"Caractères," had made up his mind to get an introduction to Boileau, and to ask the advice of that mighty censor, Boileau wrote to Racine (May 19, 1687), "Maximilian has been out to Auteuil to see me and has read me parts of his Theophrastus." Nicknames were the order of the day, and the critic called his new friend "Maximilian," although his real name was Jean, because he wrote "Maximes." There is no other country than France where the maker of maxims has stamped a deep and permanent impression upon the conscience and the moral habits of the nation. But this has been done by La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère, Vauvenargues, whom, did it not sound frivolous, we might style the three great Maximilians.

The three portraits were first exhibited as a course of lectures at the Royal Institution in February of this year. They have been revised and considerably enlarged. For the English of the passages translated or paraphrased I am in every case responsible. The chapter on "The Gallantry of France" appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*, and I thank the editor and publisher of that periodical for their courteous permission to include it here.

April 1918.

LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

One of the most gifted of the young officers who gave their lives for France at the beginning of the war, Quartermaster Paul Lintier, in the admirable notes which he wrote on his knee at intervals during the battle of the Meuse in August 1914, said—

"The imperative instinct for making the best you can of life, the sentiment of duty, and anxiety for the good opinion of others, in a word *honour*—these are the main educators of the soldier under fire. This is not a discovery: it is simply a personal statement."

Taken almost at random from the records of the war, this utterance may serve us as well as any other to distinguish the attitude of the Frenchman in the face of violent and critical action from the equally brave and effective attitude of other races. He has the habit, not common elsewhere, of analyzing conduct and of stripping off from the contemplation of it those voluntary illusions which drop a curtain between it and truth.

The result of this habit of ruthless criticism is to concentrate the Frenchman's attention, even to excess, on the motives of conduct, and to bring him more and more inevitably to regard self-love, self-preservation, personal vanity in its various forms,

as the source of all our apparent virtues. Even when we appear to be most disinterested, even when we are most clearly actuated by unselfish devotion, by *honour*, we are really the prey, as Lintier saw it, of the wish to save our lives and to preserve the good opinion of others. Underneath the transports of patriotism, underneath the sincerity of religious fervour, the Frenchman digs down and finds *amour-propre* at the root of everything.

This attitude or habit of mind is particularly shocking to all those who live in a state of illusion, and there is probably no aspect of French character which is more difficult for the average Englishman to appreciate than this tendency towards sceptical dissection of the motives of conduct. Yet it is quite certain that it is widely disseminated among those of our neighbours who are most prompt and effective in action, and whose vigour is in no degree paralysed by the clairvoyance with which they seek for exact truth even in the most romantic and illusive spiritual circumstances. To throw light on this aspect of French character, I propose to call attention to a little book, which is probably well-known to my readers already, but which may be regarded from a point of view, as I venture to think, more instructive than that which is usually chosen.

In the year 1665 there appeared anonymously in Paris, in all the circumstances of well-advertised secrecy, a thin volume of "Maximes," which were understood to have exercised for years past the best thoughts of a certain illustrious nobleman. Mme de

Sablé, who was not foreign to the facts, immediately wrote a review, intended for the *Journal des Scavants*, in the course of which she said that the new book was "a treatise on movements of the human heart which may be said to have remained until now unrecognized." The book, as every one knows, was the work of the Duke of La Rochefoucauld, and the subject of it was an unmasking of "the veritable condition of man."

It would be idle not to admit that La Rochefoucauld has been almost exclusively regarded as the chief exponent of egotism among the great writers of Europe. He has become—he became during his own lifetime—the bye-word for bitterness. He is represented as believing that egotism is the *primum mobile* of all human action, and that man is wholly the victim of his passions, which lead him whither they will. He denies all spirituality and sees a physical cause for everything we do. His own words are quoted against him. It is true that he says, "All the passions are nothing but divers degrees of heat or cold in the blood." It is true that he says, "All men naturally hate one another," and again, "Our virtues are mostly vices in disguise." Yet again, he defines the subject of his mordant volume in terms which seem to exclude all bountiful theories concerning the disinterested instincts of the human soul, for he says "*Amour-propre* is the love of one's self and of all things for one's self; it turns men into their own idolators, and, if fortune gives them the opportunity, makes them the tyrants of

others. . . . It exists in all states of life and in all conditions; it lives everywhere and it lives on everything; it lives on nothing." He does not admit that Christianity itself is immune from the ravages of this essential cankerworm, which adopts all disguises and slips from one Protean shape into another. "The refinements of self-love surpass those of chemistry," and the purpose of La Rochefoucauld is to resolve all our virtues in a crucible and to show that nothing remains but a poisonous deposit of egotism.

No wonder that La Rochefoucauld has been generally regarded as a scourge of the human race, a sterile critic of mankind without sympathy or pity. It is true that his obstinate insistence on the universality of egotism produces a depressing and sometimes a fatiguing impression on the reader, who is apt to think of him as Shakespeare's Apemantus, "that few things loves better than to abhor himself." But when the First Lord goes on to add "He's opposite to humanity," we feel that no phrase could less apply to La Rochefoucauld. We have, therefore, immediately to revise our opinion of this severe dissector of the human heart, and to endeavour to find out what lay underneath the bitterness of his "Maximes." It is a complete mistake to look upon La Rochefoucauld as a monster, or even as a Timon. Without insisting, at all events for the moment, on the plain effect of his career on his intellect, but yet accepting the evidence that much of his bitterness was the result of bad health, sense

of failure, shyness, foiled ambition, we have to ask ourselves what he gave to French thought in exchange for the illusions which he so rudely tore away. In dealing with any savage moralist, we are obliged to turn from the abstract question Why did he say these things? to the realistic one, What did he hope to effect by what he said? Perhaps we can start no better on this inquiry than to quote the Duchess of Schomberg's exclamation when she turned over the pages of the first edition—namely that "this book contains a vast number of truths which I should have remained ignorant of all my life if it had not taught me to perceive them." This may be applied to French energy, and we may begin to see what has been the active value of La Rochefoucauld's apparently negative and repugnant aphorisms.

The La Rochefoucauld whom we know belongs to a polite and modern age. He is instinct with the spirit of society, "la bonne compagnie," as it was called in the middle of the seventeenth century, when a crowd of refined and well-trained pens competed to make of the delicate language of France a vehicle which could transfer from brain to brain the sublest ingenuities of psychology. He is a typical specimen of the Frenchman of letters at the moment when literature had become the ally of political power and the instrument of social influence. Into this new world, before it had completely developed, the future author of the "Maximes" was introduced at a very early age. He was presented to the wits and *precieuses* of the Hôtel Rambouillet

at the age of eighteen. It is amusing to think that he may have seen Voiture, in the Blue Room, seize his lute and sing a Spanish song, or have volunteered as a paladin in the train of Hector, King of Georgia. But the pedantries and affectations of this wonderful society seem to have made no immediate impression upon La Rochefoucauld, whose early years were those of the young nobleman devoid of all apparent intellectual curiosity. It is true that he says of himself that directly he came back from Italy (this was in 1629, when he was only sixteen), "I began to notice with some attention whatever I saw," but this was, no doubt, external; he does not exhibit in his writings, and in all probability did not feel, the slightest interest in the pedantic literature of the end of Louis XIII.'s reign. He represented, through his youth, the purely military and aristocratic element in the society of that age. If he had died when he was thirty, or at the close of the career of Richelieu, nothing would have distinguished him from the mob of violent noblemen who made the streets of Paris a pandemonium.

To understand the influence of La Rochefoucauld it is even more needful than in most similar cases to form a clear idea of his character, and this can only be obtained by an outline of his remarkable career. François VI. Duke of La Rochefoucauld, as a typical Parisian, was born in the ducal palace in the rue des Petits-Champs, on September 15, 1613. The family was one of the most noble not merely in France but in Europe, and we do not begin to

understand the author until we realize his excessive pride of birth. In a letter he wrote to Cardinal Mazarin in 1648 he says, "I am in a position to prove that for three hundred years the monarchs [of France] have not disdained to treat us as members of their family." This arrogance of race inspired the early part of his life to the exclusion, so far as we can perceive, of any other stimulus to action. He was content to be the violent and fantastic swashbuckler of the half-rebellious court of Louis XIII. In late life, he crystallized his past into a maxim, "Youth is a protracted intoxication; it is the fever of the soul." Fighting and love-making, petty politics and scuffle upon counter-scuffle—such was the life of the young French nobleman of whom La Rochefoucauld reveals himself and is revealed by others as the type and specimen.

La Rochefoucauld is the author, not merely of the "Maximes," but of a second book which is much less often read. This is his "Mémoires," a very intelligent and rather solemn contribution to the fragmentary history of France in the seventeenth century. It is hardly necessary to point out that not one of the numerous memoirs of this period must be taken as covering the whole field of which they treat. Each book is like a piece of a dissected map, or of a series of such maps cut to a different scale. All are incomplete and most of them overlap, but they make up, when carefully collated, an invaluable picture of the times. No other country of Europe produced anything to

compare with these authentic fragments of the social and political history of France under Richelieu and Mazarin. These Memoirs had a very remarkable influence on the general literature of France. They turned out of favour the chronicles of "illustrious lives," the pompous and false travesties of history, which the sixteenth century had delighted in, and in this way they served to prepare for the purification of French taste. The note of the best of them was a happy sincerity even in egotism, a simplicity even in describing the most monstrous and grotesque events. Among this group of writers, Cardinal de Retz seems to me to be beyond question the greatest, but La Rochefoucauld is not to be despised in his capacity as the arranger of personal recollections.

We must not expect from these seventeenth-century autobiographers the sort of details which we demand from memoir-writers to-day. La Rouchefoucauld, although he begins in the first person, has nothing which he chooses to tell us about his own childhood and education. He was married, at the age of fifteen, to a high-born lady, Andrée de Vivonne, but her he scarcely mentions. By the side of those glittering amatory escapades of his on the grand scale, with which Europe rang, he seems to have pursued a sober married existence, without upbraidings from his own conscience, or curtain-lectures from his meek duchess, who bore him eight children. La Rochefoucauld's "Mémoires" open abruptly with these words:—"I spent the last years of the Cardinal's administration in indolence," and then he

begins to discourse on the audacities of the Duke of Buckingham (pleasingly spelled Bouquinquant) and his attacks on the heart of the Queen of France. We gather that although the English envoy can have had no personal influence on the future moralist—since Buckingham was murdered at Portsmouth in 1628, while La Rochefoucauld did not come to court till 1630—yet the young Frenchman so immensely admired what he heard of the Englishman, and so deliberately set himself to take him as a model, that our own knowledge of Buckingham may be of help to us in reproducing an impression of La Rochefoucauld, or rather of the Prince de Marcillac, as he was styled until his father died.

After describing the court as the youth of seventeen had found it, he skips five years to tell us how the Queen asked him to run away with her to Brussels in 1637. History has not known quite what to make of this amazing story, of which La Rochefoucauld had the complacency to write more than twenty years afterwards—

"However difficult and perilous this adventure might seem to me, I may say that never in all my life have I enjoyed anything so much. I was at an age (24) at which one loves to do extravagant and startling things, and I felt that nothing could be more startling or more extravagant than to snatch at the same time the Queen from the King her husband, and from the Cardinal de Richelieu who was jealous, and Mlle d'Hautefort from the King who was in love with her."

He tells the story with inimitable gusto. But he tells it just as an episode, and he hurries on to the death of Richelieu in 1642, as though he were conscious that up to his thirtieth year his own life had not been of much consequence.

Even in that age of turbulent extravagance, the Prince of Marcillac was known, where he was known at all, merely as a hare-brained youth who carried the intolerance and insolence of amatory youth past the confines of absurdity, and it is amusing to find Balzac, who was twenty years his senior, and who was buried in the country, describing him—surely by repute—as the type of—

" These gentlemen who chatter so much about the empire and about the sovereignty of ladies, and have their heads so stuffed with tales and strange adventures, that they grow to believe that they can do all that was done under the reign of Amadis, and that the least of their duties is to reply to a supplicating lady, I, who am only a man, how should I resist the prayer of her to whom the Gods themselves can refuse nothing? "

We seem far from the sombre and mordant author of the " Maximes," but a complete apprehension of the character of La Rochefoucauld requires the story of his adventures to be at least briefly indicated. A chasm divides his early from his late history, and this chasm is bridged over in a very shadowy way by such records as we possess of his retirement after the Fronde.

Between the death of Richelieu and this retire-

ment there lies a period of ten years, during which the future author of the " Maximes " is swallowed up in the hurly-burly of the worst moment in the whole history of France. It is difficult from any point of view to form what it would be mere waste of time for us to attempt in this connection, a clear conception of the chaos into which that country was plunged by the weakness of Anne of Austria and the criminality of Mazarin. The senseless intrigues of the Fronde affect the bewildered student of those times as though

> *this frame*
> *Of Heav'n were falling and these elements*
> *In mutiny had from her axle torn*
> *The steadfast earth.*

At first La Rochefoucauld seems to have meant to support the cause of the court, expecting to be rewarded for what he had done, or been prepared to do for the Queen. He says in his " Mémoires " that after the death of Louis XIII. the Queen-Mother " gave me many marks of friendship and confidence; she assured me several times that her honour was involved in my being pleased with her, and that nothing in the kingdom was large enough to reward me for what I had done in her service." That sounds very well, but what it really illustrates is the extraordinary violence of aristocratic frivolity, the fierce levity and insatiable frenzied vanity of the noble families. The aims of La Rochefoucauld, in support of which he was ready to sacrifice his country, were of a class that must seem to us now petty in the

extreme. He wanted the *tabouret*, the footstool, for his duchess, in other words the right to be seated in presence of the members of the royal family. He wanted the privilege of driving into the courtyard of the Louvre without having to descend from his coach outside and walk in. He demanded these honours because they were already possessed by the families of Rohan and of Bouillon. It is extraordinary to consider what powerful effects such trumpery causes could have, but it is a fact that the desolating and cruel wars of the Fronde largely depended upon jealousies of the *carrosse* and the *tabouret*. La Rochefoucauld's support of the rebellion frankly and openly was based upon it.

La Rochefoucauld brings the first part of his "Mémoires" down to 1649. In the second part he begins again with 1642, being very anxious to show, to his own advantage of course, what the conditions were at court after the deaths of Richelieu and Louis XIII., and in particular to define the position of Mme de Chevreuse, the great intriguer and seductress of the French politics of the age. The charm of this lady, who was no longer young, faded before that of the Duchess of Longueville, one of the most ambitious and most unscrupulous women who ever lived. She was the sister of the Prince de Conti, and from the time when her celebrated relations with La Rochefoucauld began, her influence engaged him in all the unplumbed chaos which led to civil war. When this finally broke out, however, in 1648, the Duke is found once more on the side of

the young king and his government, that is to say, of Cardinal Mazarin.

Through the " universal hubbub wide of stunning sounds and noises all confused," we can catch with difficulty the accents of literature, at first indeed vocal in the midst of the riot, and even stimulated by it, as birds are by a heavy shower of rain, but soon stunned and silenced by horrors incompatible with the labour of the Muses. The wars of the Fronde made a sharp cut between the heroic age of imaginative literature and the classical age which presently succeeded it, and offer in this respect a tolerable parallel to the civil wars raging in England about the same time. It is specious, but convenient, to discover a date at which a change of this kind may be said to occur. In England we have such a date marked large for us in 1660; French letters less obviously but more certainly can be said to start afresh in 1652. It is tolerably certain that in that year Pascal, Retz and the subject of our inquiry simultaneously and independently began to write. Up to that time there is no reason to believe that La Rochefoucauld had given himself at all to study, and we possess no evidence that up to the age of forty he was more interested in the existence of the literature of his country than was the idlest of the cut-throat nobility who swaggered in and out of the courtyard of the Louvre.

His " Mémoires " end with an account of the war in Guienne in 1651 which is more solemn and more detached than all the rest. No one would suspect

that the historian, who affects the gravity of a Tacitus, was acting all through the events he describes with the levity of a full-blooded and unscrupulous schoolboy. The most amazing instance of this is his grotesque attempt to have Cardinal de Retz murdered at the Palais de Justice. In the course of a sort of romping fray he caught Retz's head between the flaps of a folding door, and shouted to Coligny to come and stab him from behind. But he himself was shoved away, and the Cardinal released. La Rochefoucauld admits the escapade, without any sign of embarrassment, merely observing that Retz would have done as much by him if he had only had the chance. But now comes the incident which, better than anything else could, illustrates the feverish and incongruous atmosphere of the Fronde, and the difficulty of following the caprices of its leading figures. The very next day after this attempt to assassinate Retz in a peculiarly disgraceful way, La Rochefoucauld met the Cardinal driving through the streets of Paris in his coach. Kneeling in the street, he demanded and received the episcopal benediction of the man whom he had tried to murder in an undignified scuffle a few hours before. No animosity seems to have persisted between these two princes of the realm of France, and this may be the moment to introduce the picture which Cardinal de Retz, whose head was held in the folding door, painted very soon after of the volatile duke who had held him there to be stabbed from behind. Both writers began their memoirs in 1652, and no one

has ever decided which is the more elegant of the two unique conpositions. The conjunction between two of the greatest prose-writers of France is piquant, and we cannot trace in Retz's sketch of his antagonist the smallest sign of resentment. It was not published until 1717, but it has all the appearance of having been written sixty years earlier, at least, when Mademoiselle was seized with the fortunate inspiration of having "portraits" written of, and often by, the celebrated personages of the day. This, then, is how Retz saw La Rochefoucauld—

"There has always been a certain *je ne sais quoi* in M. de La Rochefoucauld. He has always ever since his childhood wanted to be taking part in some plot, and that at a time when he was indifferent to small interests, which have never been his weakness, and when he had no experience of great ones, which, in another sense, have never been his strong point. He has never had any skill in conducting business, and I don't know why; for he possessed qualities which in any other man would have made up for those which he lacked. He was not long-sighted enough, and he did not see as a whole even what was within his range of vision. But his good sense—which in the field of speculation was very good—joined to his gentleness, his insinuating charm, and his admirable ease of manner, ought to have compensated, more than they have done, for his defect of penetration. He has always suffered from an habitual irresoluteness; but I do not know to what this irresoluteness should be attributed. He

has never been a warrior, though very much a soldier. He has never, through his own effort, succeeded in being a good courtier, though he has always intended to be one. That air of bashfulness and of shyness which you observe in him in social life has given him in matters of business an apologetic air. He has always fancied that he needed to apologize; and this—in conjunction with his 'Maximes,' which do not err on the side of too much faith in virtue, and with his practice, which has always been to wind up business as impatiently as he started it—makes me conclude that he would have done much better to know himself, and to be content to pass, as he might well have passed, for the most polished courtier and the finest gentleman, in private life, which this age has produced."

We are now beginning to see the real author of the "Maximes," when, at the age of forty, he begins to peep forth from the travesty of his aristocratic violence and idleness. Whether the transformation would have been gradual instead of sudden is what can never be decided, but we date it from July 2, 1652, when he was dangerously wounded in a riot in the Faubourg St. Antoine, at the Picpus barricade, where he was shot in the forehead and, as it at first appeared, blinded for life. According to the faithful Gourville, when La Rochefoucauld thought he would lose his eyesight, he had a picture of Madame de Longueville engraved with two lines under it from a fashionable tragedy, the "Alcyonée" of Duryer—

That I might hold her heart and please her lovely eyes
I made my war on kings and would have fought the skies.

With this piece of rodomontade the old Rochefoucauld ceases and makes place for the author of the "Maximes." When he recovered from his wound, his spirit of adventure was broken. He submitted to the cardinal, he withdrew from Condé, and in 1653, still his head bound with bandages and wearing black spectacles to hide those clear and seductive eyes which Petitot had painted, he crept, a broken man, to his country house at Verteuil, in the neighbourhood of Ruffec, now in the Charente. This chateau, built just two hundred years before that date, still exists, a noble relic of feudal France, and a place of pilgrimage for lovers of the author of the "Maximes."

No one was ever more suddenly and more completely cured of a whole system of existence than was La Rochefoucauld by the wound which was so nearly fatal. He said, "It is impossible for any man who has escaped from civil war to plunge into it again." For him, at all events, it was impossible. His only wish in 1653 was to bury himself and his slow convalescence among his woods at Verteuil. In this enforced seclusion, at the age of forty, he turned for solace to literature, which he would seem to have neglected hitherto. We know nothing of his education, which had probably been as primitive as that of any pleasure-seeking and imperious young nobleman of the time. He went to the wars when he was thirteen. In an undated letter he says that he sends

some Latin verses composed by a friend for the judgment of his unnamed correspondent, but he adds, "I do not know enough Latin to dare to give an opinion." M. Henri Regnier, in his invaluable "Lexique de la langue de La Rochefoucauld" (1883) points out that the Duke's evident lack of classical knowledge is a positive advantage to him, as it throws him entirely on the resources of pure French. In like manner we may rejoice that Shakespeare had "little Latin and less Greek."

It is tantalizing for us that we know almost nothing of the years, from 1653 to 1656, which La Rochefoucauld spent in severe retirement at Verteuil. What was happening to France was happening, no doubt, in its degree to him; he was chewing the cud of remorse for the follies and crimes of the Fronde. "Only great men should have great failings," the exile wrote, and we may be sure that he had by this time discovered, like the rest of the world, that as a swashbuckler and intriguer he was noisy and petulant, but on the whole anything but great. The Fronde left behind it a sense of littleness, of poverty-stricken humanity, and this particular frondeur had seen the mask drop from the features of his fellow-men. Now, in the quiet of the country, in disgrace with fortune and his own conscience, he grasped a new and this time a dignified and suitable ambition. He began to study reality and learned to distinguish truth from pretence. This study was to make him one of the most eminent of French authors and a

great power in the purification of French intelligence. He began, doubtless, his career as an author by composing the "Mémoires," in which he embodied his exasperations and his recriminations in language of studied dignity. There is little here which betrays the future moralist, except the simplicity and almost colourless transparency of the style.

As containing nearly the sole certain evidence of La Rochefoucauld's state of mind at the time of transition, it is well, perhaps, to speak at this moment of his letters, which were first brought together in 1881. They extend from 1637 to 1677, and the biographer pores over them in the hope of extracting from them some crumbs of information. But to the general reader they cannot be recommended. They are seldom confidential; the writer never lets himself go. Even to his later friends, such as Mme de Sablé, La Rochefoucauld is rarely familiar, and the impression of himself in these graceful and sometimes vigorous epistles is illusive; the writer seems for ever on his guard. The great mass of this correspondence, in which politics takes no part after 1653, is singularly literary; it is mainly occupied with the interests, and almost with the jargon, of the professional author. We are told that his affectation in society was to appear cold and unmoved, and this he certainly contrived to do in those of his letters which have been preserved.

La Rochefoucauld told Mme de Sablé that he

depended on her for his knowledge of the inmost windings of the human heart. When he returned to Paris, this lady was approaching the age of sixty. Her *salon* competed with that of the Hôtel de Rambouillet and that of Mlle de Montpensier at the Luxembourg. The Marquise de Sablé had been gay in her youth, but when her young lover, Armentières, was killed in a duel, she turned devout. She also turned hypochondriacal and literary. According to Tallemont des Réaux, who has left a portrait of her which is equally ill-natured and entertaining, she built herself a house adjoining the choir of the church of Port Royal, in the Faubourg St. Jacques. Her friend, the Abbé d'Ailly, who edited her works after her death in 1678, admits that she was "one of the greatest visionaries in the world on the chapter of death." She herself expressed her hypochondria otherwise: "I fear death more than other people do, because no one has ever formed so clear a conception of nothingness as I have." Ludicrous stories were told of her excessive fear of illness, and in her fits of alarm she found comfort from the ministrations of Antoine Singlin, who was the director of Pascal's conscience.[1] She became intimate with Arnauld d'Andilly, and with the rest of those Jansenist authors of whom Racine said that their works were "the admiration of scholars and the consolation of all pious persons." But she seems to have had

[1] It was of Singlin that Pascal wrote in 1654, "Soumission total à J.C. et à mon directeur."

the cleverness to observe that in one respect the literature of Port Royal, as it expressed itself before "Les Provinciales," had the fault of being verbose and redundant. Mme. de Sablé deserves more merit than seems to have been given to her for her fervent cultivation of precise language.

As La Rochefoucauld's correspondence throws little light on the character and person of its author at the time of his intellectual and moral conversion, we turn with satisfaction to a document which owes its existence to a social amusement, almost to a "parlour game." We have seen that La Grande Mademoiselle, anxious to amuse the friends whom she gathered round her in her *salon* at the Luxembourg, hit upon the notion of inducing her guests to produce written portraits of themselves. You might say all the good of yourself you liked, on the understanding that you put in the shades as well. The collection of these self-portraits was actually printed in 1659, and is a work of great value and interest to biographer and historian. It marks a new movement of French intelligence, a critical excursion into psychology not hitherto attempted in France, and some of the portraits are marvellously delicate in their conscientious precision. Here, however, we are not concerned with more than one of them, that which is signed with the initials of the Duke of La Rochefoucauld. It is his only important composition produced between the "Mémoires" and the "Maximes," and it is charmingly written, a portrait drawn in tones of rose-colour and

dove-grey, like the pastel-portraits of a century later.

He begins by describing his physical appearance, but passes soon to the moral and social qualities. It would be interesting to quote the whole of this portrait, but we must confine ourselves to some brief quotations. How far we seem from the beasts of prey which ranged the forests of the Fronde, or tore one another to pieces in the streets of Paris, when we follow this refined attempt to present the character of a modern and a complicated man:—

"There is something," says La Rochefoucauld, "at once peevish and proud in my appearance. This makes most people think that I am contemptuous, but I am not so at all. So far as my humour goes, I am melancholy, and I am so to such an extent that, in the last three or four years, I have scarcely been seen to laugh three or four times. It seems to me nevertheless that my melancholy would be supportable and mild enough if it depended solely on my temperament, but it comes so much from outside causes, and what so comes fills my imagination to such a degree, and occupies my thoughts so exclusively, that most of the time I move as in a dream, and scarce listen to what I myself am saying."

Here we have the disappointed courtier still brooding over his disgrace, but we pass to an account of the relief which the new-born man of letters find in the cultivation of the intellect alone—

"I am fond of general reading, but that in which

I find something to fashion the mind and to fortify the soul is what I like best. Above all it gives me an extreme satisfaction to read in company with an intelligent person, for in this way one is kept constantly reflecting on what one reads, and the reflections thus exchanged form a species of conversation than which no other in the world is so agreeable or so useful. I give a sound opinion about works in verse and prose which are submitted to me, but perhaps I allow myself too much freedom in expressing that opinion. Another fault of mine is that I am sometimes too scrupulously delicate and too severely critical. I do not dislike to listen to argument, and sometimes I am glad to take my share in the discussion, but I usually support my opinion with too much heat, and when any one pleads an unjust cause in my presence, sometimes, in my zeal for logic, I myself become exceedingly illogical. My sentiments are virtuous, my inclinations are honest, and I am so intensely anxious to act in all things as a gentleman should, that my friends cannot do me a greater favour than to warn me sincerely of my faults. Those who know me rather intimately, and who have been so kind as to give me their counsels in this direction, are aware that I have ever received them with all imaginable joy and with all the submission of mind which they could possibly desire."

All this, and what remains, show that in the character of La Rochefoucauld action had abruptly receded in favour of analysis, and the brutality

of civil war in the woods had given place to the refinement of endless conversation by the fireside corner. The old swashbuckler turned from the illusions of the camp to the most exquisite of peaceful associations, and he regarded women from a totally new point of view. It was the age of the *salons*, and La Rochefoucauld tells us why it was that he became their sedulous associate. He says, "When women are intelligent, I like their conversation better than that of men. There is a certain suavity in their talk which is lacking in that of our sex, and it seems, in addition, that they explain themselves with more precision, and give a more agreeable turn to what they say." In other words, La Rochefoucauld had, by 1658, become a complete, and indeed the most competent and highly finished example of the new social intelligence which was to be found in France. We must dwell for one rapid moment on what that new spirit was.

The seventeenth century in France, liberated from the weight of internecine wars and political tyrannies, had now thrown itself with ardour into the civilized arts, and had, in particular, developed a love of moral disquisition. All the talk which presently became fashionable about virtue and the higher life was a reaction against the horrors of the Fronde. The advance of social refinement was very rapid, and, especially in Paris, there was a determined and intelligent movement in the direction of the amelioration of manners and a studied elegance of life. M. Rébelliau has pointed out that

it was precisely at this moment that a great number of new words, and among them *délicate, distinguer, moraliste, ménagements, finesse* and many others, were accepted as part of the French language. These served immediately to enrich the vocabulary of the men and women who were anxious to push further and deeper their investigations into psychological analysis. With this social tendency to dissect the human heart and to seize its most secret movements, was combined the religious and, as we may put it, protestant fashion of the hour, in the spirit of Port Royal. To be a moralist was almost in itself to be a Jansenist, and we see the author of the "Maximes" presently claiming to be, after a fashion, evangelical.

There is so little said about theology, in the direct sense, in the writings of La Rochefoucauld, that his various French critics have given perhaps too little thought to his religious tendencies. They have treated him as though he were the enemy of a pious life. But if we examine that contention from the standpoint provided for us by our own Puritan habit of thought, we must recognize that there was something positively pious about the bitter philosopher of the "Maximes." He was trying, let us never forget, to discover a scientific form of morals, and hardly enough attention has been given to the prominence which he gave to a searching analysis of conscience. He found little to help him in the court religion of the age, but he was immensely impressed with the Jansenist con-

ception of the frailty and worthlesness of the natural man. Hence, his persistency in cultivating almost exclusively the society of those men and women of Port Royal with whom we might suppose that he had very little in common. But, quite recently, a discovery has been made, which is not only of special interest to us as Englishmen, but which throws a further light on the evangelical or puritan tendency of the author of the " Maximes."

A careful scholar, M. Ernest Jouy, was led by a passage in a seventeenth-century MS. to make investigations which seem to have proved that La Rochefoucauld was acquainted with an English book of edification and even that he deigned to make use of it in the fashioning of his famous " Maximes." This was " The Mystery of Self-Deceiving," published in 1615 by a semi-nonconformist Puritan divine, Daniel Dyke, minister of Coggeshall in Essex, and translated obscurely into French by a certain Vernulius. Of the original work Fuller wrote, " It is a book which will be owned for a truth while men have any badness in them, and will be owned as a treasure whilst they have any goodness in them." It is, certainly, an amazing thing to find that this clumsy old treatise of English divinity was apparently possessed as a treasure by the most elegant and the most sceptical of Frenchmen.

La Rochefoucauld may be conceived as saying to the practical divines of Port Royal, " Your work is confused and thwarted by the vast prevalence of rubbish under which morals are concealed. I will

help you to force the people who talk so glibly of humanity and pity, of rectitude and amiability, to dissect the real bodies of egotism to which they give those names. I put Man in the pillory of self-judgment; it is for you to deal evangelically with what remains of his temperament when he comes down out of the ordeal."

To do this, La Rochefoucauld prepared, with infinite patience and with the conscientiousness of a great literary artist, his sheaf of Maxim-arrows, ready to shoot them, one by one, into the gross heart of *amour-propre.* What, then, were the reflexions which, now settled in Paris, and secure from the rough world in the recesses of Mme de Sablé's *salon,* the Duke began to fashion and to polish? A maxim is a formula, which comprehends the whole truth on a particular subject. Coleridge says, in his "Table Talk," that a maxim is a conclusion upon observation of matters of fact; we may add that it is final, it goes as far as it can possibly go, and contains the maximum of truth in the minimum of verbiage. If we take some of the most cynical and savage maxims of La Rochefoucauld we may see that conciseness could proceed no further: for instance, "Virtue is a rouge that women add to their beauty"; or "Pride knows no law and self-love no debt"; or "The pleasure of love is loving." The ingenuity of man has not devised a mode of saying those particular things as exactly in fewer words. They reach the maximum of conciseness, and are therefore called maxims.

It is very unusual in the history of literature to be able to point to a man of genius as the positive founder of a class of work. When we look closely into the matter, we are sure to find that there was an obscure predecessor, a torch-bearer who lighted up the path. Even Shakespeare has Marlowe in front of him, and in front of Marlowe are Greene and Peele. Several poets were inspired by the story of the fall of the rebel angels before Milton took up " Paradise Lost " and seized that province as his own by conquest. In like manner, La Rochefoucauld seems to us in a general view, and seemed indeed to his own Parisian contemporaries, to have invented a new art in the production of his " Maximes." But, in truth, he was not the pioneer, and he seems to have spent months, and even years, in a sort of apprenticeship to two authors who have not survived in French literature as he has. So far as we can make out, the real creator of the maxim in French was Jacques Esprit (1611–1678), the Abbé Esprit as he was called, although he was never a priest, and had a legitimate wife and family. He was a young man from Béziers in Provence, who came to Paris under the protection of Chancellor Séguier, soon became a member of the French Academy, and enjoyed a steady social and literary success.

There seems little doubt that Esprit was known early to La Rochefoucauld, for he was familiar in the family of the Duke and Duchess of Longueville, and later the governor of their children. He enjoyed

the confidence of the *salons* from an early date. There is some reason to suppose that Esprit had begun to write maxims before La Rochefoucauld's return from exile, and certainly before Mme de Sablé's retreat to Port Royal in 1659. It is very noticeable in La Rochefoucauld's letters to Esprit —most of which belong to the year 1660—that he treats the academician—who was of plebeian birth and not many months older than himself—with extreme deference. The Duke adopts the style of a pupil to a master, and he submits his sketches or experiments in maxim-making to Esprit for a severe criticism, which he accepts, and for advice, which he adopts. The probability seems to be that Esprit introduced the fashion for writing maxims to Mme de Sablé, who was fascinated by it, recommended it to La Rochefoucauld, and then pointed Esprit out as the acknowledged master of the art, who could give invaluable technical advice.

There was a sort of collaboration. We find La Rochefoucauld writing to Esprit, "I shall be much obliged if you will show *our* last sentences to Mme de Sablé; it may perhaps induce her to write some of her own." And to the lady he writes, "Here are all my maxims which you have not yet seen, but as nothing is done for nothing, I beg you to send me in return the receipt for the carrot soup which we had when Commander de Souvré dined at your house." The three maximists consulted one another, polished up one another's sentences, and suggested subjects which were first discussed

round the dinner-table or in the summer parlour and then worked up, sometimes by all three conjointly, to the highest pitch of perfection. It was probably Esprit by whom many of the original suggestions were started, indeed it is he who seems to have first laid down the formula that "the mind is the servant and even the dupe of the instincts," which both Pascal and La Rochefoucauld were presently to expand in such brilliant forms. But it is quite an error to presume, as some writers have done, that there was a kind of factory for maxims, out of which sentences were turned which really belonged to no one in particular. The "Maximes" of Mme de Sablé and those of the Abbé Esprit—the latter contained in a Jansenist volume called "The Falsity of Human Virtues"—were published independently, but in the same year, 1678. Any one who has the patience to refer to these works may satisfy himself that Mme de Sablé, as an artist, is superior to Esprit, but immeasurably inferior to La Rochefoucauld, who is the one unapproachable master of the maxim.[1]

[1] A good deal of the prejudice which successive critics, and (very mischievously) Brunetière in particular, have shown with regard to the character of La Rochefoucauld, is due, in my opinion, to the influence of Victor Cousin, who published, in 1854, a disjointed and diffuse, but in many ways brilliantly executed volume on Mme de Sablé. Cousin, who examined, for the first time, a vast array of MS. sources, deliberately lowered the value of La Rochefoucauld in order to enhance the merit of the lady, of whom the learned academician wrote like a lover. Even Esprit was thrown into the scale to lighten the weight of the Duke's originality. Cousin was borne gaily on the

For six or seven years the Duke worked away at the polishing of his incomparable epigrams, and it was not until October 27, 1665, that the little famous book made its anonymous appearance. The importance of the work was perceived immediately in the close circle of the *salons* which regulated literary opinion in Paris. For half a century past Frenchmen had been regarding with jealous attention the causes and effects of human passion, culminating, for the moment, in the treatise written by Descartes for the daughter of the Queen of Bohemia. The Jansenists and the Jesuits, the playwrights, the novelists, Hobbes and Spinoza, all pursued, along widely different paths, those illusive secrets of the human heart which had escaped the notice of earlier generations. But La Rochefoucauld reduced the desultory psychology of his predecessors to a system, so that for us the moralizing tendencies of the seventeenth century in France seem to have found their final expression less in the sob of Pascal's conscience than in the resigned ironic nonchalance of La Rochefoucauld, who, as Voltaire so admirably says, " dissolves every virtue in the passions which surround it." Perhaps what the " Maximes " most resembled was the then recently-published analysis of egotism in " Leviathan." But the cool and atrocious periods of what

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stream of his heroine-worship, and others less profoundly acquainted with the facts have let themselves be carried with him. But it is time that we should cease to imitate them in this.

Sir Leslie Stephen calls "the unblushing egotism" of Hobbes have really little in common with the sparkling rapier-strokes of La Rochefoucauld, except that both these moralists—who may conceivably have met and compared impressions in Paris—combined a resolute pessimism about the corruption of mankind with an epicurean pursuit of happiness.

The Maxims of La Rochefoucauld were atoms of gold sifted through the mesh of discussions at the dinner-table, around the fire in winter, under the hawthorns and lilacs which Mme de Sévigné describes, in endless talk between two or more trained and intelligent persons, along the course of which thought oscillated from extreme to extreme, until at last the company dispersed, leaving La Rochefoucauld to capture and to fix the essential result of all that desultory conversation. It is not impossible for us to conjecture the general character of this brilliant and illusive talk. It had one central aim, more or less clearly perceived, namely the desire to reach a Latin standard of perfection. It sought to exchange for the romantic barbarism which had underlain so much that was picturesque in the sixteenth century—a barbarism which had come down from the late Middle Ages, and which was really a dissolution of strong things outworn—to exchange for this a preciousness of quality as against mere rude bulk. It desired to introduce depth of purpose in the place of chaotic moral disorder, originality in place of a frenzied and

incoherent eccentricity, and to found a solid structure upon a basis of intellectual discipline.

But in order to carry out this fine scheme, and especially in order successfully to check that decadence which had alarmed the best minds in France, there was a pioneer work to be done. It was necessary to intensify and purify the light of criticism. For this purpose the conversations of the *salons* culminated in the lapidary art of La Rochefoucauld, who was not a creator like Racine and Molière, like Bossuet and Fenelon, but who prepared the way for these slightly later builders of French literature by clearing the ground of shams. Segrais, whose recollections of him are among the most precious which have come down to us, says that La Rochefoucauld never argued. He had the Socratic manner, and led others on to expose and expound their views. His custom was, in the course of the endless talks about morals and the soul, "to conceal half of his own opinion, and to show tact with an obstinate opponent, so as to spare him the annoyance of having to yield." There is something very like this in the "Pensées" of Pascal. La Rochefoucauld blames himself, in his self-portrait, for arguing too fiercely, and for being testy with an opponent, but these faults were not perceived by other people. Doubtless he was aware of an inward impatience, and succeeded in concealing it by means of that extreme politeness on which he prided himself.

The "Maximes" are shocking to persons who

live in a state of illusion about themselves, and they were so from the hour of their publication. They roll up a bitter pill for human vanity. When Mme de La Fayette, destined to look deeper than any other mortal into the soul of La Rochefoucauld, read them first in 1663, in company with Mme du Plessis at the Château de Fresnes, she was terrified and shocked at what she called the " corruption " which they revealed. She wrote to Mme de Sablé, who had lent her the manuscript—

" Ah, Madame, how corrupt he must be in mind and heart to be capable of imagining such things ! I am so frightened by it that I should say, if this were not a matter too serious for jest, that such maxims are likely to do more to upset him than all the plates of soup he swallowed at your house the other day."

As the " Maximes " pass from hand to hand, we see the spiritual Mænads of Port Royal clustering " with a lovely frightened mien " about the sinister author, while he turns " his beauteous face haughtily another way," like young Apollo in the Phrygian highlands. The word " pessimism " was, I believe, unknown until the year 1835, but this is what Mme de La Fayette and the rest of the Jansenist ladies meant by " corruption." Perhaps the most celebrated of all the sayings of her terrible friend is that which declares that " In the misfortunes of our friends there is always something which gives us no displeasure." She was about to learn that no one had a nobler practice in friendship than the

cynic who wrote this: "There are good marriages, but no delicious ones"; Mme de La Fayette's own marriage had been not at all delicious and not even good. "Gratitude in the majority of men is simply a strong and secret wish to receive still greater benefits." Terrifying this must have been to a sentimental and exalted bosom, and exclusive of all hope until the little word "majority" was observed, a loophole offered for scared humanity to creep out at.

The design of La Rochefoucauld was to make people ashamed of their egotism, and so to help them to modify it. He saw France deadened by a universal sycophancy, and tyrannized over by a court life which made a lie of everything. He insisted upon the value of individual sincerity, but in a voice so harsh and bitter, and in such sardonic phrases—as when he says: "Sincerity is met with in very few people, and is usually nothing but a delicate dissimulation to attract the confidence of others"—that the more timid of his auditors shrank from him, as if he had been Hamlet or Lear. When he dared to suggest that none of these maxims were intended to refer to the reader himself, but only to all other persons, he invited the reaction which led Huet, Bishop of Avranches, to appeal against the morality of the "Maximes," as suited only to the vices of wicked persons, "improborum hominum vitiis," and to issue a warning against the too-sweeping cynicism of Roccapucaldius, as he called the Duke. This was, perhaps, the beginning of the

dead-set against La Rochefoucauld. It encouraged Rousseau, a century later, to talk of "ce triste livre," and to declare, in the true romantic spirit, that "Bad maxims are worse than bad acts." There have always been, and always will be, people who experience a sort of *malaise*, an ill-defined discomfort, as though they sat in an east wind, while they read La Rochefoucauld. This is particularly true of Englishmen, who resent being told that "Our virtues are often only our vices in disguise," and who also, by the way, are constitutionally impatient of the French genius for making what is ugly, and even what is detestable, pleasing by the surface of style.

There is an element of unmercifulness in the candour of La Rochefoucauld which is distressing to sentimentalists. But this was characteristic of the age, which looked upon compassion as a frailty, as a break-down of noble personal reserve. He shall speak on this matter for himself—

"I am little sensible of pity, and if I had my way, I would avoid it altogether. At the same time, there is nothing I would not do to relieve an afflicted person: and I believe as a matter of fact that one ought to go so far as to express compassion for the misfortunes of such a man, since the unhappy are so stupid that compassion does them more good than anything else in the world. But I also hold that one should confine one's self to professions of pity and be very careful not to feel any. Pity is a passion which is wholly useless to a well-constituted mind;

it can but weaken the heart, and it ought to be left to people who, carrying nothing out in a logical manner, require passion to constrain them to do things."

He seems to paint himself in tones of Prussian blue, but we must really think of him as of a man timid, and at the same time preternaturally wide-awake, who was determined at all risks not to be taken at a disadvantage. When he was an old man, when much communing with Mme de La Fayette had allayed his suspicion of mankind, La Rochefoucauld said to Mlle de Scudery, "I hope that clemency will come into fashion, and that we shall see no more men unhappy." [1] He professed to found politeness on extreme *amour-propre*, but perhaps in a still closer analysis he would have discovered its basis in kindness of heart. He resists the temptation to weaken his own pessimism, just as in his biting sarcasms about love we may trace a tender soul still bleeding from the wounds which Mme de Longueville's levity had inflicted on it.[2]

[1] Mme de Sévigné told her daughter that she was sure that if one could peep at the Duke and Mme de La Fayette "when they were alone with the cat," one would find all the restraints of society flung aside, and see them without the mask, their cynicism forgotten, mingling cries and tears over the sorrows of the world. But neither she nor any third person would ever see their social discretion thus betrayed, and she concludes, in her droll way, "C'est une vision!" In another letter to Mme de Grignan (June 6, 1672) she says of the Duke, "Il connaît quasi aussi bien que moi la tendresse maternelle."

[2] There was unquestionably a strong vein of tenderness running through the stoical character of the Duke, and if we were more intimately acquainted with his private life

To understand the wholesome influence which La Rochefoucauld has exercised on French character, we must keep constantly in sight his hatred of falsehood. If he is angry and sardonic, it is because he sees, or thinks he sees, falsehood everywhere masquerading as virtue. His foremost duty was to pluck the mask from the false virtues which strutted everywhere through the society and literature of France. Voltaire recognized nothing else in La Rochefoucauld but this sardonic misanthropy, this determination to prove that man is guided solely by self-interest. This Voltaire thought was the *seule vérité* contained in the "Maximes," and in a measure he was right. The moralist saw

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we should probably see many traces of it. Such traces exist as it is. We have Mme de Sévigné's account of his reception of the news of the Passage of the Rhine. It was announced to him, on the 17th of June, 1672, at the house of Mme de La Fayette, in the presence of Mme de Sévigné, that in that terrible disaster his eldest son had been dangerously wounded and his fourth son, the Chevalier, killed. The tears seemed to start out of the depth of his heart, and they brimmed his eyes, although his self-command prevented an outbreak of grief. But there was a further complication. The young Duke of Longueville was also killed at the Rhine, and he, as a select circle of intimate friends were perfectly aware, was really the love-child of La Rochefoucauld. Mme de Sévigné, having given a superficial account of the incident, characteristically goes on to say, "Alas! I am telling a lie; between ourselves, my dear, he does not feel the loss of the Chevalier so much; it is that of the young man whom all the world regrets which leaves him so inconsolable." And again she says: "I saw the secrets of his heart revealed under this cruel blow; and no one that I have ever seen surpasses him in courage, in honour, in tenderness, in balance of mind." This is a tribute not to be overlooked.

amour-propre as an Apollyon straddling right across the pathway of mankind; he saw lies flourish everywhere, and proclaim themselves to be the truth. The conscience of mankind was seduced or browbeaten by the impudency of self-love. Thus—

"We have not the courage to say broadly that we ourselves have no defects, and that our enemies have no good qualities; but as a matter of fact that is not far from being what we think."

He believed not at all, or very faintly, in altruism. He had to sweep away affected and therefore erroneous suppositions with regard to morality, and particularly with regard to social motives. He had come back to Paris, after his long and irksome exile, with a terrible clear-sightedness, and he saw that society had gone to pieces and that truth was essential to its rebuilding. He was convinced—and this must be asserted in the face of his own apparent cynicism—he was convinced of the existence of pure virtue, but he thought that *amour-propre* in the individual, and conventionality (what was then meant by *la coutume*) in the social order, had made it almost as rare as the dodo. He wished, by his stringent exposure of the arts of lying, to save virtue before it was absolutely extinct. He had the instinct of race-preservation.[1]

[1] It is possible that the conversation of Mme de Sablé concentrated his thoughts on self-love. A contemporary MS. says of that lady, "Elle flatte fort l'amour propre quand elle parle aux gens." But egotism was a new discovery which fascinated everybody in the third quarter of the century.

Let us turn to the few, but profoundly beautiful reflections which form the constructive element in La Rochefoucauld's teaching. His aim in edification is to train us to dig through the crust of social sham to the limpid truth which exists in the dark centre of our souls—

"If there is a pure love, he says, exempt from all admixture with other passions, it is that which lies hidden at the bottom of the heart, and of which we ourselves are ignorant."

Unlike Mandeville, our own great cynic of the eighteenth century, La Rochefoucauld, while calling in question the reality of almost all benevolent impulses, stopped short of denying the existence of virtue itself. He would not have said, as the author of the "Fable of the Bees" (1714) did, that the "hunting after this *pulchrum et honestum* is not much better than a wild-goose chase." But he had a strong contempt for the humbugs of the world, and among them he placed unflinching optimists. One of the main forms of humbug in his day was the legend that everybody acted nobly for the sake of other people. This La Rochefoucauld stoutly denied, but he was not so excessive as his commentators in his condemnation of that self-love which he declares to be the source of all our moral actions. He insinuates the possibility of an innocent and even a beneficial egotism. He says, "The praise which is given us serves to fix us in the practice of virtue," and if that is true, *amour-propre* must be practically useful. Helvétius, who made some very valuable

comments on the "Maximes" a hundred years later, pointed out that *amour-propre* is not in itself an evil thing, but is a sentiment implanted in us all by nature, and that this sentiment is transformed in every human being into either vice or virtue, so that although we are all egoists, some are good and some are bad.

La Rochefoucauld, therefore, while he takes a very dark view of the selfishness of the human race, softens the shades of his picture by admitting that egotism may be, and often must be, advantageous not merely to the individual but to the race. And here we find the key to one of the oddest passages in his works, that in which he attributes his inspiration to two saints, St. Augustine and St. Epicurus! He says—

"Everybody wishes to be happy; that is the aim of all the acts of life. Spurious men of the world and spurious men of piety only seek for the appearance of virtue, and I believe that in matters of morality, Seneca was a hypocrite and Epicurus was a saint. I know of nothing in the world so beautiful as nobility of heart and loftiness of mind: from these proceeds that perfect integrity which I set above all other qualities, and which seems to me, at my present stage of life, to be of more price than a royal crown. But I am not sure whether, in order to live happily and as a man of the highest sense of honour, it is not better to be Alcibiades and Phaedo than to be Aristides and Socrates.

It would take us too far out of our path to com-

ment on the relation of this epicureanism to the religion of La Rochefoucauld's day, but a few words seem necessary on this subject. He says extremely little about religion, although he makes the necessary and perhaps not wholly perfunctory, statement that he was orthodox. But the position of a votary of St. Epicurus had grown difficult. Since the Duke's exile, the enmity between the church and the world had become violent, so violent that a man of prominent social and intellectual position was bound to take one side or another. We may note that the years during which the " Maximes " were being composed were precisely those during which Bossuet was thundering from the pulpit his anathemas against worldly luxury and the pride of life. The period marked at one extremity by " L'Amour des Passions " (1660) and at the other by the " Grandeurs Humains " (1663) is precisely that in which the lapidary art of La Rochefoucauld was most assiduous. The church was advocating asceticism and humility with all its authority, and was leading up towards the later phase of the fanatical despotism of Louis XIV.'s old age, with all its attendant hypocrisy. For the moment, in the struggle, La Rochefoucauld, though no *dévot*, would seem a friend of the church rather than a foe, and in fact he retained the intimacy of Bossuet, in whose arms he died. We may be sure that he guarded himself with delicate care from the charge of being what was then called a " libertine," that is a man openly at war with the theory and practice of the theologians.

It is said that La Rochefoucauld invented[1] the word "vraie," "true," to describe the character of Mme de La Fayette. His intimacy with this illustrious lady is one of the most beautiful episodes in the history of literature, and perhaps its purest example of true friendship between the sexes. The phrase we have already quoted shows that in 1663 the two great writers were acquainted but not yet intimate. Marie de la Vergne, Comtesse de La Fayette, was in her thirtieth year, La Rochefoucauld had completed his fiftieth when some cause which remains obscure drew them together with a tie which death alone, after seventeen wonderful years of almost unbroken association, was to sever. There was no scandal about it, even in that scandal-mongering age. The astute Mlle de Scudéry, writing to her gossip Bussy Rabutin (December 6, 1675), says, "Nothing could be happier for her, or more dignified for him; the fear of God on either side, and perhaps prudence as well, have clipped the wings of love." Twelve years before, when Ménage had repeated to her some critical remarks about her novel, "La Princesse de Montpensier," Mme de La Fayette had replied, "I am greatly obliged to M. de la Rochefoucauld for his expressions. They are the result of our similarity of experience, 'de la belle sympathie qui est entre nous.'"

[1] Mme de Sévigné seems not to have known this when, in writing to her daughter (July 19, 1671), she claims to have been the first to say *vraie* when she meant sincere, loyal. "Il y a longtemps que je dis que vous êtes *vraie*."

The famous friends were excluded by their physical conditions from the activities of life. Mme de La Fayette, who was perhaps something of a hypochondriac, tossed all day among the pillows of that golden bed with the extravagance of which the austerity of Mme de Maintenon upbraided her. La Rochefoucauld, tormented by the gout, lay stretched at her side in his long chair, and the days went by in endless discussion, endless balancing of right and wrong, much gossip, much reading of books new and old, and not a little consultation of artist with artist. They kept their secrets well, and no curiosity of successive critics has been able to discover how much of La Rochefoucauld is hidden in the pages of "La Princesse de Cleves," the earliest of the modern novels of the world, nor how much of Mme de La Fayette in the revised and re-revised text of the "Maximes." [1] But we know that she was no less sagacious and no less an enemy to illusion than he was, and those are probably not far wrong who have detected a softening influence from her conversation on the late genius of La Rochefoucauld.

In 1675 Mme de Thiange presented to the Duke du Maine a toy which has long ago disappeared, and for the recovery of which I would gladly exchange many a grand composition of painting and sculpture. It was a sort of gilded doll's house, representing

[1] Bussy Rabutin writes to Mme de Sévigné that he hears that La Rochefoucauld and Mme de La Fayette are preparing "quelque chose de fort joli." This shows that before "La Princess de Cleves" was finished the Duke's name was identified with its composition.

the interior of a *salon*. Over the door was written, "Chambre des Sublimes." Inside were wax portrait-figures of living celebrities, the Duke du Maine in one arm-chair; in another La Rochefoucauld, who was handing him some manuscript. By the arm-chairs were standing Bossuet, then Bishop of Condom, and La Rochefoucauld's eldest son, M. de Marcillac. At the other end of the alcove Mme de La Fayette and Mme de Thiange were reading verses together. Outside the balustrade, Boileau with a pitchfork was preventing seven or eight bad poets from entering, to the amusement and approval of Racine, who was already inside, and of La Fontaine, who was invited to come forward. The likeness of of these little waxen images is said to have been perfect, and there can hardly be fancied a relic of that fine society which would be more valuable to us in re-establishing its social character. We know not what became of it in the next generation. No doubt, the wax grew dusty, and the figures lost their heads and hands, and some petulant châtelaine doomed the ruined treasure to the dustbin.

No mention of Mme de Sévigné is made in the inventory of the "Chambre des Sublimes," and yet there is no one to whom we owe an exacter portraiture of its inmates, nor one who was more worthy to animate its golden recesses. For the last ten years of La Rochefoucauld's life she was one of the closest observers of the famous sedentary friendship. Unfortunately she tells us nothing about the original publication of the "Maximes," for his

name does not occur in her correspondence before 1668, and does not abound there until 1670. Then we find her for ever at the Duke's house, or meeting him at Mme de La Fayette's bedside. He gratified her by warm and constant praise of Mme de Grignan, whose letters were regularly read to the friends by her infatuated mother. It is vexing that Mme de Sévigné, who might have spared us two or three of her immortal pages, although she incessantly mentions and even quotes La Rochefoucauld, generally refrains from describing him. She and Mme de La Fayette were his guests in the country on May 15, and the three wonderful companions walked in the harmony of "nightingales, hawthorns, lilacs, fountains and fine weather," or played with his pet white mouse. Such touches are rare, and Paris seems best to suit what Mme de Sévigné admirably calls "the grey-brown" thought of La Rochefoucauld.

In 1671 he had a terrible attack of the gout, accompanied by agonies moral and physical which filled the ladies with alarm and pity. Better in 1672, he was able to entertain company to hear Corneille read his new tragedy of "Pulchérie" in January, and Molière his new comedy, "Les Femmes Savantes," in March. He was now, in premature old age, the venerable figure in the group, the benevolent Nestor of the salons. Let his detractors remember that Mme de Sévigné, who knew what she was talking about, wrote that "he is the most lovable man I have ever known." His sufferings, his dis-

enchantments and disappointments, only seemed to accentuate his beautiful patience. Just before his fatal illness (January 31, 1680) Mme de Sévigné writes again : " I have never seen a man so obliging, nor more amiable in his wish to give pleasure by what he says." [1] Her detailed and pathetic account of his last hours, which closed on the night of March 16, 1680, testifies to her deep attachment and to Mme de La Fayette's despair.

When Mme de Sévigné, in 1675, received the third edition of the Duke's book, which contained more than seventy new maxims, she wrote, " Some of them are divine; some of them, I am ashamed to say, I don't understand." Probably she would have partly agreed with some one's criticism of them, " De l'esprit, encore de l'esprit, et toujours de l'esprit—trop d'esprit ! " [2] No doubt, La Rochefoucauld has done his own reputation wrong by the

[1] Two of La Fontaine's fables, " L'Homme et son Image " and " Les Lapins," were dedicated to La Rochefoucauld in 1668. In the former we read :—

On voit bien où je veux venir.
Je parle a tous, et cette erreur extrême
Est un mal que chacun se plaît d'entretenir.
Notre âme, c'est cet homme amoureux de lui-même ;
Tant de miroirs, ce sont les sottises d'autrui,
Miroirs, de nos défauts les peintres légitimes ;
Et quant au canal, c'est celui
Que chacun sait : le livre des Maximes.

[2] The practice of making " maxims," *axiomata*, encouraged the enlivenment of conversation by the introduction of topsy-turvy statements, such as " Constancy is merely inconstancy arrested," in the manner of Oscar Wilde and Mr. Chesterton.

bluster of his scepticism and also by the fact that he sometimes wraps his thoughts up in such a blaze of epigram that we are disconcerted to find, when we analyze them, that they are commonplaces. Contemporaries seemed to have smiled at the excessive subtlety into which their long conversations led Mme de La Fayette and her sublime companion. Mme de Sévigné describes such talks with her delicate irony, and says, "We plunged into subtleties which were beyond our intelligence." An example is the dispute whether "Grace is to the body what good sense is to the mind," or "Grace is to the body what delicacy is to the mind" should be the ultimate form of a maxim. They sometimes drew the spider's thread so fine that it became invisible.[1]

But his clearness of insight was immense, and he was too profoundly intelligent to be a merely destructive or sterile force. He builded better than he knew. For instance, courage, it has been alleged, he

[1] La Rochefoucauld was not without affectations. He spoke airily about his *manière négligée* of writing, whereas no one ever took more pains. Segrais gives very interesting information on this point: he says that the Duke "sent me from time to time what he had been working on, and he wished me to keep these note-books of his for five or six weeks, so as to be able to give them my closest attention, particularly with regard to the turn of the thoughts and the arrangement of the words. Some of his maxims he altered as many as thirty times." But when he wrote to Esprit, in 1660, La Rochefoucauld affected to regard his own writings as trifles thrown off "au coin de mon feu." The great of the earth have these amiable and amusing weaknesses.

denies, and indeed he is so savage in his exposure of braggadocio that it might well be believed that he refused to admit that men could be brave. Yet what does he say?—

"Intrepidity is an extraordinary force of the soul which lifts it above those troubles, disorders and emotions which the aspect of great peril would otherwise excite; it is by this force that heroes maintain themselves in a state of equanimity, preserving the free use of their reason through the most surprising and the most terrible accidents."

This must include the most moving of all accidents, those which call forth moral and physical courage in the face of national danger, and are rewarded by *gloire*, by public and lasting fame. And we are led on to a consideration of the lengthy reflection on the spirit in which the approach of death should be faced, with which he closed the latest edition of the "Maximes," declaring that "the splendour of dying with a firm spirit, the hope of being regretted, the desire to leave a fair reputation behind us, the assurance of being released from the drudgery of life and of depending no more on the caprices of fortune," are remedies which would medicine our pain in approaching the dreaded goal of our existence.

We must read La Rochefoucauld closely to perceive why a book so searching, and even so cruel as his, has exercised on the genius of France a salutary and a lasting influence. His savage pessimism is not useless, it is not a mere scorn of humanity and a

sneer at its weaknesses. It tends, by stripping off all the shams of conduct and digging to the root of action, to make people upright, candid and magnanimous on a new basis of truth. So we come at last to see the significance of Voltaire's dark saying of the " Maximes " : " This book is one of those which have contributed most to form the taste of the French nation, and to give it the spirit of accuracy and precision."

LA BRUYÈRE

LA BRUYÈRE

La Bruyère was thirty-five years of age when La Rochefoucauld died, and twenty when the "Maximes" were published. We have no evidence that he ever met the former, but he certainly read the latter, and in spite of his eager denial that Pascal or La Rochefoucauld suggested his method to him—"I have followed neither of these paths," he says—it is impossible to doubt that the example of the "Maximes" had a great deal to do with the form of the "Caractères." His own disciple, Brillon, tells us of La Bruyère that, "the author of the work which this age has most admired was at least ten years writing it, and about as long hesitating whether he would write it or not." The "Caractères" was finished in 1687; Brillon's estimate takes us back to 1667 or earlier, and the brilliant success of the "Maximes" dates from 1665. Every author imagines that he loses some dignity by being supposed to follow the lead of another author, although the entire history of literature is before him to show that the lamp of genius has always been handed on from hand to hand. La Bruyère, in particular, was not exempt from this amiable weakness, but his

ghost needs feel no displeasure if we insist on connecting him with the effort of La Rochefoucauld.

It is very amusing to see how anxious La Bruyère is not to seem to owe anything to La Rochefoucauld. He speaks of his own writings as "less delicate" than those of the Duke, and in his own opening words he declares that he has had no wish to write maxims, "which are laws in morals," as he has no legislative authority. I suppose that in describing the tone of La Rochefoucauld as "delicate" La Bruyère really meant supercilious, and deprecated any idea that he, the typical bourgeois, should seem to lay down the law like the architype of intellectual aristocracy. He scoffs at the Duke for making his reflections "like oracles," so short are they and so concise; and he is quite correct when he boasts of the extreme variety and versatility of his own manner. He accuses La Rochefoucauld of browbeating his readers into subjection to his thought; while, La Bruyère says, "for my part I am quite willing that my reader should say sometimes that I have not observed correctly, provided that he himself will observe better." The reader, on the other hand, must not be taken in by all this, which is very characteristic of La Bruyère's timid self-confidence. His reputation loses nothing by our discovering that he owes much to Montaigne and still more to La Rochefoucauld.

The link is clear, in spite of the foliage with which La Bruyère seeks to conceal it. It could only be from La Rochefoucauld that the author of "Les

Caractères " derived that sad disillusionment, lighted up by flashes of savage wit, with which he expresses his sense of the defects of human character. It may often be noted that when La Bruyère speaks of egotism, of the prevalence of *amour-propre*, his pungent phrases have the very sound of those of his precursor. The truth is that a strong new book is not read by a young man whose genius is prepared for its teaching, without its image being stamped upon his mind. La Bruyère's own experience had already offered to him a banquet of the bitter fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil when he met with the " Maximes " of 1665. His conscience and his memory were prepared, and the truth is that a great deal of La Rochefoucauld's teaching passed into his veins without his knowing it. This does not in the least undermine the reputation which justly belongs to La Bruyère as one of the most original writers of France, or even of Europe, but it links him for our intelligence with the other great moralist of his century.

The author of the " Maximes " was the head of one of the great princely houses of France. The author of the " Caractères " was the type of the plebeian citizen of Paris. If La Rochefoucauld offers us the quintessence of aristocracy, La Bruyère is not less a specimen of the middle class. His reputation as an honest man long suffered from his own joke about his ancestry. He wrote, " I warn everybody whom it may concern, in order that the world may be prepared and nobody be surprised, that if ever

it should happen that one of the mighty of the earth should deem me worthy of his care, in other words if I should ever come into an immense fortune, there is a Godefroi de La Bruyère whom all the chroniclers place in the list of the greatest nobles of France who followed Godefroi de Bouillon to the conquest of the Holy Land. When that happens, I shall descend from him in the direct line." One would think that a child could perceive this to be a satire at the profiteers of the age, who invented ancestors, and so a child would to-day, but in the seventeenth and even the eighteenth century it was not safe to be funny. In particular, nonsense—the divine charm of which we now admit—had not been acclimatized, and was looked upon with grave displeasure. It wrings the heart that when Goldsmith, in a purple coat, pretended to think himself more attractive than the Jessamy Bride, his contemporaries severely censured this as an instance of his "vanity."

So the fools and fops of La Bruyère's time thought or pretended to think that he was seriously claiming to be of noble birth. Nothing was further from his intention; no La Bruyère had taken part in the Crusades, any more than any member of Charles Lamb's family had been Pope of Rome. The moralist's father, Louis de La Bruyère, was Comptroller-General of Rents of the Hôtel de Ville of Paris; his mother was an attorney's daughter. The eldest of five, he was born on August 17, 1645, in the centre of old Paris, close to the church of St. Christopher. It is only of late years that this fact has been

discovered, and there are still immense blanks in the life of La Bruyère during which he disappears from us altogether, engulfed in the lanes of the Cité, not because of any adventurous mystery, but simply because of his total lack of adventure. There has scarcely lived a great man of letters in comparatively recent times about whose life there is so little to relate as about that of La Bruyère. He is believed to have gone to school to the Fathers of the Oratory, but even that is not certain. His knowledge of Greek is thought to prove it, but, though the Oratorians were admirable Hellenists, surely Greek could be learned elsewhere.

When he was twenty, he passed his examination in law in Orleans, and, coming back to Paris, practised as a lawyer for eight or nine years. He was concerned in no famous case, it is supposed, since his name is never mentioned in the gossip of the time. He inherited a competence from his father, and probably lived an idle life, diversified by a little legal business of a very mediocre nature. As his biographer says, he grew more and more "inclined by his temperament to a meditative existence." When he was in his thirtieth year, a crisis came. By some means or other, he secured a lucrative sinecure, that of treasurer of finances at Caen in Normandy. He hated the country and went down to Caen on the rarest occasions possible. La Bruyère, a Parisian to the marrow of his bones, says, "Provincials and fools are always ready to lose their temper and believe that one is laughing at

them or despising them. You must never venture on a joke, even the mildest, except with well-bred, witty people." Perhaps he had been trying Godefroi de La Bruyère off on the stolid inhabitants of Caen. He received a salary, however, which was far from being all paid away to a substitute, and he rose, in the curious social scale of those days, from Mister (*roturier*) into Esquire (*écuyer*). The court in Normandy was extremely angry with him at periodical intervals, but apparently could do nothing to assert itself. When it raged, La Bruyère was like the East in Matthew Arnold's poem, he " bow'd low before the blast in patient, deep disdain."

He lived through these quiet years in one apartment after another in the heart of Paris. Vigneul de Marville saw him " nearer heaven than earth " in a room which a light curtain divided into two. " The wind, always at the service of philosophers, running ahead of visitors, would lift this curtain adroitly, and reveal the philosopher, smiling with pleasure at the opportunity of distilling the elixir of his meditations into the brain and the heart of a listener." He was always at work, but his work was confined to meditation, talk and study. Sometimes he left his garret, and studied " the court and the town " from the benches of the public gardens, the Luxembourg and the Tuileries. There has been an enormous amount of speculation and conjecture about the central period of the life of La Bruyère, but we really have only one positive document to go upon. During the illness of his own footman, he borrowed

the services of his brother's man, who robbed him of money and clothes. La Bruyère put the case in the hands of the police, who failed to catch the thief. This is the only definite fact which has rewarded the patience of the investigators, and we must build round it what we can. We build round it his own glimpse of self-portraiture (in "Des Biens de Fortune") and find the philosopher bending over the volume where Plato discusses the spirituality of the soul, or measuring, with a rapt expression, the infinite distance between Saturn and Jupiter.[1]

When he is on the point of entering his fortieth year, La Bruyère suddenly breaks out of the cloud which encompasses him, and is revealed as professor of history to the Duke of Bourbon, and resident in the household of the great Prince de Condé. There is no evidence to show how Bossuet, then Bishop of Meaux, and the most influential man of intellect in France, became acquainted with the discreet and obscure treasurer of finances; but it is evident that he was struck by the vast learning and intelligence of this silent, smiling anchorite. Fontenelle tells us

[1] "Vigneul de Marville," to whom we owe some picturesque impressions of La Bruyère at this time of social obscurity, was one of the pseudonyms of Bonaventure d'Argonne, whose real name appears to have been Noël Argonne. He was a Carthusian who dabbled in literature, and who towards the close of his career compiled a volume of "Mélanges," containing anecdotes which are often spiteful, but sometimes useful to the historian of literature. He seems to have visited La Bruyère in the days of his comparative poverty, when his mother kept home for the whole family, first in the Rue Chapon, and later in the Rue des Grands Augustins.

that Bossuet, who had been tutor to the Dauphin, "made a practice of supplying to the princes such persons, meritorious in letters, as they had need of." In 1684, then, we know not why nor how, Bossuet recommended La Bruyère as tutor to the House of Condé. It is a matter of ceaseless wonderment, however, that the philosopher accepted and retained the post. He possessed a sufficient though a modest competence already, and he exchanged a life of complete independence for a most painful and trying servitude, hung up between the insolence of those above and the impertinence of those below him. The situation of La Bruyère in the Maison de Condé was like that of Fanny Burney at the court of George III., only worse. Commentators have expended endless ingenuity in conjecturing what were the reasons which induced him to enslave himself.

A careful study of his great book must add to our amazement. No one ever locked himself up in prison with an exacter appreciation of the discomforts of captivity. La Bruyère has some remarks about freedom, which plunge us in bewilderment. "Liberty," he says, "is not laziness: it is a free use of one's time; it is having the choice of one's own work and exercise. To be free, in a word, is not to do nothing, but to be sole judge of what one shall do or not do. In this sense, what a boon is liberty!" This practical freedom he possessed to the full, when in August 1684 he accepted bondage to a spiteful monkey of a boy, a dwarf with a huge

head and a dreadful face, to whom he was to impart, with tears of disappointment and humiliation, the rudiments of national history. He was immediately responsible to the father of this infant phenomenon, to Henry Jules, Duke d'Enghien, of whose "useless talents, wasted genius, imagination which was a torment to himself and others," Saint-Simon gives so copious an account. We have to think of our delicate and timid La Bruyère now for years the powerless plaything of this "unnatural son, cruel father, terrible husband, detestable master, pernicious neighbour, without affection, without friends."

But after two centuries of canonization of the Condés, it has now become the fashion to denigrate them to an equal excess. The traditional figure of the Grand Condé, Olympian and sublime, has been exposed by pitiless documentary evidence. La Bruyère's latest and most learned editor, M. Emile Magne, gives a terrible picture of the Prince's meanness and dirtiness; Harpagon in an ostler's jacket, he calls him, *en souquenille*. But to dwell on all this is to forget that the great Condé, even in his ugly old age, was haloed by the glory of having been the first soldier of the world. It was a privilege, even at the end, to be admitted to his intimacy, and I believe that we pity La Bruyère more than he pitied himself. It scandalizes the biographers that the Prince, on one occasion, made La Bruyère dance a *pas seul* before him, twanging a tune on the guitar. I suppose De Quincey would have been complaisant if the Duke of Wellington had asked him

to whistle " Home, Sweet Home " to him. There is a limit, after all, to the modern theory of the Dignity of Letters.

Valincourt says that " All the time La Bruyère lived in the House of Condé, everybody was always making fun of him." Possibly the fear of appearing pedantic among all these people of fashion and these tinselled flunkeys made him lend himself to ridicule. They all teased and mocked him, I suppose, but not, I think, so as seriously to hurt him, and now, with his book in our hands, the laugh is on his side. For when we examine carefully we see that his position in the House of Condé improved as time went on. He got rid of his rivals, the other tutors; when the Grand Condé died, La Bruyère got rid of his dreadful pupil as well. We find him no longer " précepteur," but " gentilhomme de M. le Duc,"—no longer, that is, a mere scholastic drudge, but a sort of lord-in-waiting. He had probably a large increase of salary, since in 1687 he seems to have resigned his " charge " at Caen. Instead of being pinned to the dark apartment in the recesses of the Cité, he now revolved in ceaseless movement between Chantilly and Fontainebleau, Paris and Versailles. He became a sort of confidential reader to the Duke and Duchess, an essential part of the suite. After the first years, he had a great deal of leisure. He could retire to the security of a handsomely furnished apartment—upholstered in green—on the second floor of the Hôtel de Condé, opposite the Luxembourg, and he had another set of rooms at Versailles.

The bondage became, I expect, no real bondage at all.

But why had he, so long completely his own master, consented to become the servant even of famous Royal princes? I think that as mothers accept irksome situations for the support of their children, so La Bruyère became the serf of the Condés for the sake of his book. For it is now time to reveal the fact that in this apparently listless, empty life there was one absorbing secret interest. This was the collection of the maxims, reflections, pictures, and what not which he had been quietly absorbing and turning into the honey of more and more exquisite prose ever since his early youth. I think that La Bruyère deliberately accepted all that might prove irksome in the captivity to the House of Condé for the sole sake of his book. He needed to see more types, and types of a more brilliant and effective kind than he could become familiar with in his mediocre condition. He knew all that was to be known about the artizans and the shopkeepers of the Cité; he wanted to examine the rulers of society, and while he watched them like a naturalist, they might make what contortions they pleased. How did one of his contemporaries describe him? "When Ménippe leaves his home, it is for the purpose of studying the attitudes of the whole human race and of painting them from the life. But he is not merely a portrait-painter, he is an anatomist as well. Do you see that vain and arrogant fellow in the midst of his good fortune? He is enchanted to think

Ménippe is admiring him. What a mistake! At this very moment Ménippe is dissecting him and preparing him as a specimen for a public lecture in the schools. Not a vein, not a fibre will escape him, and from that man's heart he will draw the inmost springs of passion and expose the circulation of every vice."

It is time, however, to present the famous book in which all these investigations were noted, the cabinet where all these butterflies and less beautiful insect-forms were exhibited. The final title of it is "Characters; or, the Manners of this Age." It was published in January 1688, but, as is believed, had been begun nearly thirty years earlier, and slowly finished, the final revision and arrangement dating from 1686 and 1687. The book, like so many of the world's masterpieces, is short, and a fashionable novelist of to-day could scribble in a fortnight as many words as it contains. But there is not a careless phrase nor a hurried line in the whole of it. I do not know in the range of literature a book more deliberately exquisite than the "Caractères." It started, probably, with the jotting down of social remarks at long intervals. Then, I think, La Bruyère, always extremely fastidious, observed that the form of his writing was growing to resemble too much that of La Rochefoucauld, and so he began to diversify it with "portraits." These had been in fashion in Paris for more than a generation, but La Bruyère invented a new kind of portrait. He says, on the very first page of the "Caractères," "you

make a book as you make a clock"; he ought to have said, "I make *my* book," for no other work is quite so clock-like in its variety of parts, its elaborate mechanism, and its air of having been constructed at different times, in polished fragments, which have needed the most workmanlike ingenuity to fit them together into an instrument that moves and rings.

What perhaps strikes us most, when we put down the "Caractères" after a close re-perusal of one of the most readable books in all literature, is its extraordinary sustained vitality. It hums and buzzes in our memory long after we have turned the last page. We may expand the author's own mage, and compare it, not with a clock, but with a watchmaker's shop; it is all alive with the tick-tick of a dozen chronometers. La Bruyère's observations are noted in a manner that is disjointed, apparently even disordered, but it was no part of his scheme to present his maxims in a system. We shall find that he was incessantly improving his work, revising, extending and weighing it. He was one of those timid men who surprise us by their crafty intrepidity. It was dangerous to publish sarcastic "portraits" of well-known influential people, and there are few of these in the first edition, but when the success of the book was once confirmed these were made more and more prominent. It was not until the eighth edition, of 1694, that La Bruyère ventured to print the following study of one of the most influential men of letters of that day, Fontenelle—

The Portrait of Cydias

"Ascange is a sculptor, Hegion a bronze-founder; Æschine a fuller, and Cydias a wit—that is his profession. He has a signboard, a workshop, finished articles for sale, mechanics who work under him. He cannot deliver for more than a month the stanzas which he has promised you, unless he breaks his word to Dosithée, who has ordered an elegy from him. He has an idyl on the loom; it is for Crantor, who is hurrying him, and from whom he expects a handsome price. Prose, verse, which do you want? He is equally successful with either. Ask him for letters to sympathize with a bereavement or to explain an absence, and he will undertake them. If you want them ready-made, you have only to enter his shop, and to choose what you like. He has a friend whose only duty upon this earth is to promise Cydias a long time ahead to a certain set of people, and then to present him at last in their houses as a man of rare and exquisite conversation; and, there, just as a musician sings or a lute-player touches his lute before the people who have engaged him, Cydias, after having coughed, and lifted the ruffle from his wrist, stretched out his hand and opened his fingers, begins to retail his quintessential thoughts and his sophistical arguments. . . . He opens his mouth only to contradict. 'It seems to me,' he gracefully says, 'that the truth is exactly the contrary of what you say,' or 'I cannot agree with your opinion,' or even

'that used to be my prepossession, as it is yours, but now——!'"

The idol of the gossips, "the prettiest pedant in the world," was thus paid out for his intrigues against La Bruyère in the French Academy.[1]

There was great danger, or so it would seem to a timid man like La Bruyère, in affronting public opinion with a book so full of sarcasm and reproof, so unflinching in its way of dealing with success, as the "Caractères." He adopted a singular mode of self-protection. That was the day of the mighty dispute between the Ancients and the Moderns, and La Bruyère, at all events ostensibly, took the highly respectable side of the Greeks and Romans. There had lived a philosopher in the fourth century B.C., Theophrastus, the successor and elucidator of Aristotle, who left a book of "Ethical Characters" (*Ἠθικοὶ χαρακτῆρες*), which had been introduced to

[1] The contemporary "keys," which were generally ill-informed and ill-informing, said that Cydias was Perrault. But it is almost certain that Fontenelle was meant. M. A. Chassang has brought together a formidable list of Fontenelle's activity. He wrote for Thomas Corneille part of "Psyché" (1678) and of "Bellerophon" (1679); for Donneau le Visé the comedy of "La Comète" (1681); for Beauval the "Éloge" on Perrault (1688); for Catharine Bernard part of her tragedy of "Brutus" (1691); a discourse for the prize of eloquence given by the French Academy, and signed by Brunel (1695); and part of "L'Analyse des infiniments petits" for the Marquis de l'Hôpital (1696). This is merely part of the work turned out of Fontenelle's factory before the death of La Bruyère. Another candidate for the type of Cydias is Fontenelle's uncle, Thomas Corneille (1625–1709).

the Western world by Casaubon at the end of the sixteenth century. For some reason or other, the greatest impression had been made by Theophrastus in England, where there appeared a large number of successive imitations or paraphrases of his "Characters." In France, on the other hand, Theophrastus was still unknown to the vulgar, when La Bruyère took him up. It seems likely that his own collection of portraits and maxims was practically finished, when, as M. Paul Morillot has put it, he determined to hoist the Greek flag as a safeguard. He made a French translation of the sketches of Theophrastus, and he put this at the head of his book, waving it to keep off the public, as a lady unfurls her parasol at a cow whose intentions are uncertain.

The evidences of La Bruyère's extreme caution are amusing. He hesitated long, but in 1687 he submitted his MS. to Boileau, who was highly encouraging, and to the poet-mathematician, Malizian, who said, "This will bring you plenty of readers and plenty of enemies." Finally he determined to risk the dive, and he took the book to Michallet, the publisher, saying as he did so, "If it is successful, the result shall be your daughter's dowry," the said daughter being a little child who was then seated on La Bruyère's knee. The ultimate success of the book being prodigious, Mlle Michallet must, by the time she was marriageable, have become a remarkable *parti*, but the story is not one which commends itself to the Incorporated Society of Authors. "Les Caractères" was published in January 1688, and the critics, with the veteran Bussy-Rabutin at their

head, welcomed it with shouts of applause. Bussy frankly said, "It must be admitted that having proved the merit of Theophrastus by his translation, he has obscured the fame of that writer by what he has done next, for he has penetrated, in his own portraits, deeper into the heart of man than Theophrastus did, and has penetrated with even greater delicacy and by means of more exquisite language." This must have been very gratifying from the survivor of the great school of Malherbe and Balzac.

At the age of forty-three, then, previously unknown in the world of letters, this shy and obscure gentleman-in-waiting to the Princes of Condé, rose into fame, and enjoyed the admiration or the envy of whatever was most prominent in Paris. The public which he addressed was one which we may pause a moment to contemplate. The authority of the Academic and noble *salons* was practically at an end, and intellectual culture had spread to a somewhat wider circle. Those who governed taste had thrown off many affectations of a previous generation, and in particular the curious disease of "preciousness." They were healthier, soberer and slightly less amusing than their forerunners. But they formed, in the heart of Paris, the most compact body of general intelligence to be met with at that time in any part of the world. They were certain, in their little sphere, of their æsthetic and logical aims. They were the flower of an intense civilization, very limited, in a way very simple; so far as the adoption of outer impulses went, very inactive,

and yet within its own range energetic, elegant and audacious. To this world the "Caractères" was now offered, modestly, as though it were a summing up of the moralizations of the last fifty years. The author begins by deprecating the idea that he has anything new to impart. His trick is rather subtle; he concentrates our attention on the sayings of an ancient Aristotelian philosopher, and then, as if to fill up the time, he ventures to repeat a few reflexions of his own. These he introduces with the words: "Everything has been said, and we arrive too late into a world of men who have been thinking for more than seven thousand years. In the field of morals, all that is fairest and best has been reaped already; we can but glean among the ancients and among the cleverest of the moderns." In this insinuating manner, he leads the reader on to the perusal of his own part of the book, and soon we become aware how cold and dry and pale the Greek translation seems beside the rich and palpitating world of the new French morality.

Whether he perceived it or not—and I for one am convinced that he did perceive it—La Bruyère introduced a new thing into French literature; he opened out, we may almost say, a new world. The classical attitude of the great age had produced splendid manifestations of thought and form. However revolutionary it pleases us of 1918 to be, we cannot get away from the perfection of the age of Bossuet and Racine and La Fontaine and Fénelon. We come back to these solid and passionate writers after

each one of our romantic excursions, not entirely satisfied with them, as our forefathers were, but with a sense of their solid glory, with a confidence in their permanent value in stimulating and supporting human effort. They may not give us all that they were once presumed to give, but they offer us a firm basis; they are always there for the imagination to start from. We must not forget, of course, that in 1688 in Paris these classics of the hour represented a great deal more than that; their prestige was untarnished. They so completely outshone, in cultivated opinion, all else that had been produced since the Christian era, that the Italy of Dante, the Spain of Cervantes, and the England of Shakespeare did not so much as exist. If the intelligence was not satisfied by Descartes, well! there was nothing for it but to go back to Plato, and if Racine did not sufficiently rouse the passions, they must be worked upon by Sophocles. In all this, the divines took a particularly prominent place because they alone presented something for which no definite parallel could be found in antiquity. It was the great theologians of the age with whom La Bruyère chiefly competed.

These theologians were themselves artists to a degree which we have now a difficulty in realizing, although in the seventeenth century the Church of England also had some great artists in her pulpits. If Jeremy Taylor had been a Frenchman, the work of La Bruyère might have been different. But the French orators lacked the splendour and oddity of

the author of "The Great Exemplar," and we can feel that La Bruyère, who was instinct with the need for colour, was dissatisfied with the broad outlines and masses of character for which the French divines were famous; indeed, even Bossuet, to an English reader fresh from Fuller and Taylor, seems with all his magnificence too abstract and too rhetorical. La Bruyère determined to be less exacting and yet more exact; he would sink to describing emotions less tremendous and to designing figures of more trifling value, but he would paint them with a vivid detail hitherto unsolicited. The consequence was that the public instantly responded to his appeal, and we have continued to contemplate with reverence Bossuet's huge historical outlines, but to turn for sheer pleasure to La Bruyère's finished etchings of the tulipomaniac and the collector of engravings.

Everyone who approaches an analysis of the "Caractères" is obliged to pause to commend the style of La Bruyère. It is indeed exquisite. At the time his book was published our own John Locke was putting together his famous "Thoughts on Education," and he remarked on the "policy" of the French, who were not thinking it "beneath the public care to promote and reward the improvement of their own language. Polishing and enriching their tongue," so Locke proceeds, "is no small business amongst them." It is perhaps not extravagant to believe that in writing these words the English philosopher was thinking of the new Parisian

moralist. For La Bruyère was a great artist; who understood the moral value of form in a degree which would peculiarly commend itself to the lucid mind of Locke. He says, early in his book, "Among all the different expressions which can render a single one of our thoughts, there is only one which is right. We do not always hit upon it in speaking or composing; nevertheless it is a fact that somewhere it exists, and everything else is feeble and does not satisfy a man of intelligence who desires to be understood." This search for the one and only perfect expression was an unfailing passion with La Bruyère. In another place he says: "The author who only considers the taste of his own age is thinking more of himself than of his writings. We ought always to be striving after perfection, and then posterity will render us that justice which is sometimes refused to us by our contemporaries." This is an ideal to which Locke, anxious to make disciples by his regular and sometimes racy use of language, never attained. La Bruyère, who did not address the passing age, so polished his periods that all successive generations have hailed him as one of the greatest masters of prose.

Voltaire's definition of the style of La Bruyère is well known, but cannot too often be repeated. He calls it "a rapid, concise, nervous style, with picturesque expressions, a wholly novel use of the French language, yet with no infringement of its rules." Fortunately, with all his admiration of others—and his great chapter "Des Ouvrages de l'Esprit" is

one of the most generous and catholic examples of current criticism which we possess in all literature—with his modest and glowing appreciation of his famous predecessors, he did not attempt to imitate them in the grand manner. We are able to perceive that Bossuet, who was nearly twenty years his senior, to whom he owed his advancement in life, whose majestic genius and princely prestige were so well adapted to dazzle La Bruyère, remained his indefatigable patron and probably his closest friend. But we do not find in La Bruyère a trace of imitation of the great preacher whom he loved and honoured. If we think what the authority of Bossuet had come to be at the time when the "Caractères" was published, how hardly its evangelical science pressed upon the convictions of all Frenchmen, and particularly upon those of men who accepted it as unquestionably as did the author of that book, that there should be no trace of Bossuet on his style is a great tribute to the originality of La Bruyère.

"There is no pleasure without variety," this same mighty Bossuet had written in 1670, and his young friend had taken the axiom to heart. We find him pursuing almost beyond the bounds of good taste the search for variety of manner. He has strange sudden turns of thought, startling addresses, inversions which we should blame as violent, if they were not so eminently successful that we adopt them at once, as we do Shakespeare's. La Bruyère passes from mysterious ironies to bold and coarse invective, from ornate and sublime reflections to phrases of a

roguish simplicity. He suddenly drops his voice to a shuddering whisper, and the next moment is fluting like a blackbird. The gaiety with which he mocks the ambitions of the rich is suddenly relieved by the dreadful calm with which he reveals the horror of their disappointments. He is never in the same mood, or adopting the same tone, for two pages running. It is difficult in a translation to give an idea of the surprising element in his style, but something of its oddity may be preserved in such an attempt as this—

"There are creatures of God whom we call men, who have a soul which is intelligence, and whose whole life is spent and whose whole attention is centred in the sawing of marble. This is a very simple, a very little thing. There are others who are amazed at this, but who themselves are utterly useless, and who spend their days in doing nothing at all. This is a still smaller thing than sawing marble."

English prose, which a century earlier had limped so far behind French in clearness and conciseness, was rapidly catching its rival up, and in the next generation was to run abreast with it. But if we wish to see how far behind the best French writers our own best still were, we need but compare the exquisite speed and elasticity of the "Caractères" with the comparative heaviness and slowness of a famous Theophrastian essay published in the same year, 1688, namely the "Character of a Trimmer." In the characteristics of a lively prose

artist, we shall have to confess La Bruyère nearer to Robert Louis Stevenson than to his own immediate contemporary, Lord Halifax.

The surface of La Bruyère's writing is crisp and parched, but it is easy by careful reading to crack it, and to discover the coolness, the softness, the salutary humidity which lie beneath the satirical crust of his irony. He is primarily a satirist, dealing as he says with the vices of the human mind and the subterfuges of human self-deception. He lays bare "the sentiments and the movements of men, exposing the principles which actuate their malice and their frailty"; he aims at showing that such is the native evil implanted in their souls that "no one should any longer be surprised at the thousands of vicious or frivolous actions with which their lives are crowded." We note him at first as entirely devoted to these painful investigations, and we are apt to confound his attitude with that of La Rochefoucauld, the weary Titan, who sighs contemptuously as he holds up to censure the globe of human *amour-propre*. But we do not begin to understand the attitude of La Bruyère until we notice that there always is, in the popular phrase, "more in him than meets the eye." He is indeed a satirist, but not of the profound order of the Timons of the mind; his satire is superficial, and under it there flows a lenient curiosity mingled with a sympathy that fears to be detected.

There is a note of sadness, a mysterious melancholy, which frequently recurs in the "Caractères,"

and this produces a constant variety in its appeal to the feelings. We find the author amusing himself by detailing the weaknesses of his fellow-beings, but the entertainment they offer him soon leaves him dissatisfied and sad. He is overheard to sigh, he is seen to shake his head, as he turns his clear eyes away from the self-humiliation of men. There is nothing of this in the hard superiority of La Rochefoucauld, and one of the most important things which we have to note is the advance in feeling which the later moralist makes, in spite of his extremely unpretentious attitude. La Bruyère attains to a reasoned tolerance which neither his immediate predecessor nor Pascal nor Bossuet reached or had the least wish to reach. In him we meet, not commonly nor prominently presented, but quite plainly enough, the modern virtue of indulgence, of tolerance. Here is a passage which could scarcely have been written by any other moralist of the seventeenth century :—

"It is useless to fly into a passion with human beings because of their harshness, their injustice, their pride, their self-love and their forgetfulness of others. They are made so, it is their nature, and to be angry about it is to be angry with the stone for falling or with the flame for rising."

Here is the voice of the man who had lived and who was still living in the house of that Prince de Condé of whom Saint Simon said that, "A pernicious neighbour, he made everybody miserable with whom he had to do." I like to imagine La

Bruyère escaping from some dreadful scene where Henry Jules had injured his dependants and insulted his familiars, or had drawn out in public the worst qualities of his son, "incapable of affection and only too capable of hatred." I imagine him escaping from the violence and meanness of those intolerable tyrants up into the asylum of his own hushed apartment at Versailles; there flinging himself down for a moment in the alcove, on the painted bedstead, then presently rising, with a smile on his lips and the fright and anger gone out of his eyes, and advancing to the great oaken bureau which displayed his faience and his guitar. He would glance, for encouragement, at the framed portrait of Bossuet which was the principal ornament of the wall above it, and then, listening a moment to be sure that he was safe from disturbance, he would unlock one of the three drawers, and take out the little portfolio in which for years and years he had been storing up his observations upon society and his consolations in affliction. Presently, with infinite deliberation and most fastidious choice of the faultless phrase and single available word, he would paint the Holbein portrait of one of the prodigious creatures whom he had just seen in action, some erratic, brilliant and hateful "ornament of society" such as the Duke de Lauzun, and the picture of Straton would be added to his gallery:—

"Straton was born under two stars; unlucky, lucky in the same degree. His life is a romance: no, for it lacks probability. He has had beautiful

dreams, he has bad ones: what am I saying? people don't dream as he has lived. No one has ever extracted out of a destiny more than he has. The preposterous and the commonplace are equally familiar to him. He has shone, he has suffered, he has dragged along a humdrum existence: nothing has escaped him. . . . He is an enigma, a riddle that can probably be never solved."

La Bruyère aimed at the improvement of human nature. La Rochefoucauld had said, "Don't be ridiculous—a blatant love of self is the only spring of your being." Pascal, less haughty but more overwhelming, had said, "Insect that you are, doomed to damnation, cease to strive against your own miserable impotence." La Bruyère's teaching was not so definite, partly because his intellect was not so systematic as theirs, but partly because he was more human than either, human with more than a touch of the modern democratic humanity. His attitude was the easier one implied in the sense that "there is so much that's good in the worst of us, and so much that's bad in the best of us" that there is room, even among moralists, for an infinite indulgence. His was, on the whole, and accounting for some fluttering of the nerves, a very tranquil spirit. He is much less formal and mechanical than La Rochefoucauld, and he seems to study men with less dependence on a theory. His own statement should not be overlooked; he says, very plainly, that he desired above all things to make men live better lives.

Boileau said that the style of La Bruyère was "prophetic," and I do not know that any one has attempted to explain this rather curious phrase. But we may adopt it in the light of more than two centuries which were unknown to Boileau. More than any other writer of the end of the seventeenth century La Bruyère prophesied of a good time coming. He did not speak out very plainly, but it is the privilege of prophets to be obscure, and their predictions are commonly not comprehensible until after the event. But we may claim for La Bruyère the praise of being a great civilizer of French thought; more than that, he widened human social intelligence throughout Europe. He is the direct ancestor of the Frenchman of to-day who observes closely and clearly, who has the power to define what he sees, and who retains the colour and movement of it. To this day, as may be amply seen in the records and episodes of the war, in the correspondence of officers at the front, in the general intellectual conduct of the contest, Frenchmen rarely experience a difficulty in finding the exact word they want. These men who arrest for our pleasure an impression, who rebuild before us the fabric of their experience, descend in direct line from La Bruyère. It was he who taught their nation to seize the attitude and to photograph the gesture.

La Bruyère's express aim is to clarify our minds, to make us think lucidly and in consequence speak with precision. We have already seen what value

he sets on the right word in the right place. He is the enemy of all those who shamble along in the supposition that an inaccurate phrase will " do well enough," and that any slipshod definition is excused by our saying, " Oh, you know what I mean ! " His own style is finished up to the highest point, and it is brightened and varied with such skill that the author never ceases to hold the attention of the reader. He reaches the very ideal of that elegant wandering art of writing which the Latins called *sermo pedestris*. Indeed, he gives so much attention to the perfect mode of saying things that some critics have brought it as a charge against him that he overdoes it, that in fact his style is more weighty than his subject. This, I think, is a very hasty judgment, founded a little, no doubt, upon a certain dread on La Bruyère's part of being commonplace. He was dealing, as every moralist is bound to deal, with ideas of a more or less primitive character, to which sparkle and force must be given by illustrative examples. These examples gave him his great chance, and he built them up, those exemplary " portraits " of his, with infinite labour, accumulating details to make a type, and sometimes, it is possible, accumulating too many. The result is that the " Caractères " are sometimes a little laboured; I do not know any other fault that can be laid to their charge.

One of the most important qualities of La Bruyère was that he prepared the popular mind for liberty. He is democratic in many ways, in his language,

where he often borrows words from the *patois* of the common people; in his exposure of the errors of the *ancien régime*, its tyranny, its selfishness, its want of humanity and imagination; in his hatred of wealth, the scandalous triumph of which had already reached a pitch which the next generation was to see outdone. In all this, as cannot be too often insisted upon, it was essential for a reformer to be prudent. The People had no voice, and that their interests should be defended was inconceivable.[1] In the next century, after the reign of Louis XV. was over and speech had, in a great measure, become free, it was not understood how difficult it was under Louis XIV. to express any criticism of the feudal order. For instance, there is a long passage at the end of the chapter "De la Ville," which scandalized the political reformers of the eighteenth century. It is that which begins, "The emperors never triumphed in Rome so softly, so conveniently, or even so successfully, against wind and rain, dust and sunshine, as the citizen of Paris knows how to do as he crosses the city to-day in every direction. How far have we advanced beyond the mule of our ancestors!" La Bruyère was charged, and even by Voltaire, with

[1] Perhaps the earliest Frenchman to have his full attention called to the miseries of the poor, was Vauban, whose benevolence was an object of amazement to his own contemporaries. Saint-Simon notes that "Patriote comme il l'était, il avait toute sa vie été touché de la misère du peuple et de toutes les vexations qu'il souffrait." This would be particularly the case when Vauban was writing the "Projet d'une dixième royale," finished in 1698.

attacking the progress of civilization, and with preferring the rude subterfuges of Carlovingian times to the comforts of 1688. But he was really making an appeal for thrift and modesty of expenditure on the part of those bourgeois who had suddenly become rich, as a satirist of our own day might denounce the pomp of a too successful shopkeeper, without being accused of denying the convenience of motor-cars or desiring to stop the progress of scientific invention.

La Bruyère was the first effective moralist who realized what a monstrous disproportion existed between the fortune of the rich and of the poor.[1] If we read the chapter "Des Biens de Fortune" we may be astonished at his courage, and we may see in him a direct precursor of the revolution which

[1] The wonderful passage in which La Bruyère dwells on the condition of the French peasant of his day marks a crisis in the conscience of Europe. It occurs in the chapter "De l'Homme": "We see certain wild animals, male and female, scattered over the fields, black, livid and scorched by the sun, fastened to the soil which they delve and stir with an invincible obstinacy: they have a sort of articulate speech, and when they stand up upon their feet, they show a countenance that is human: and in short they are human beings. They creep back at nightfall into dens, where they live on black bread, water and roots. They spare the rest of mankind the trouble of sowing, ploughing and reaping what is required for food, and accordingly they seem to deserve that they should themselves not lack the bread which they have sown." And in "Des Biens de Fortune" he says: "There are sorrows in the world that grip the heart; there are men and women who have nothing, not even bread, who shudder at the approach of winter, who have learned the significance of life, while others eat fruit forced out of due season, and compel the soil and the seasons to indulge their fastidiousness."

took a little more than a hundred years to gather before it broke on France. He describes the great of the earth with a savage serenity, and then he adds, "Such people are neither relatives, nor friends, nor citizens, nor Christians, nor perhaps even men. They have money." There are many such maxims in the chapter "De l'homme" which must have set people's thoughts running in channels which had before been wholly dry. La Bruyère was not a political reformer, and we must not exaggerate the influence of his charming book in this particular direction. But, as a popular imaginative writer, he took a long step in the democratic direction. Frenchmen were already touched in their consciences and beginning to examine the state of their souls with anxiety; but the teachers of the ascetic revival had been too uncompromising. Ordinary mortals could not hope to reach the ascetic ideal of Port Royal, they could only be discouraged by the savage attacks on *amour-propre*, while in the "Caractères" they met with a lay-preacher who was one of themselves, and who did not disdain to encourage moral effort.

It was a great advantage to La Bruyère, and a sign of his genius, that he was able to descend from the pulpit, and walk about among his readers with a smile, recognizing them as reasonable beings. He is persuasive; his forerunners had been denunciatory. He may be harsh and sometimes unjust, but he is never contemptuous to human nature. He feels that he is addressing a wide public of

intelligent men and women, whom he would fortify against the moral tyranny of the violent and the rich. For this purpose, though he would tell them their faults, he would not shut the gates of mercy in their faces. But how admirably he himself puts it in his chapter " Des Jugements " :—

" A man of talent and reputation, if he allows himself to be peevish and censorious, scares young people, makes them think evil of virtue, and frightens them with the idea of an excessive reform and a tiresome strictness of conduct. If, on the other hand, he proves easy to get on with, he sets a practical lesson before them, since he proves to them that a man can live gaily and yet laboriously, and can hold serious views without renouncing honest pleasures; so he becomes an example which they find it possible to follow."

When we look round for an author of high importance on whom the influence of La Bruyère was direct, we find the most obvious to be an Englishman, and our own enchanting " Mr. Spectator." Addison was born when La Bruyère was twenty-seven; when the " Caractères " was published he was an undergraduate at Queen's College, Oxford, walking in meditation under the elms beside the Cherwell. Addison was not in France until La Bruyère had been some months dead; there can have been no personal intercourse between them; but he stayed at Blois for over twelve months in 1699 and 1700, and during that time he was much in company with the Abbé Phélippeaux,

member of that family of friends who had so efficiently supported La Bruyère's candidature to the French Academy only six years before. I do not think this fact has been noted, but surely it is almost certain that in their talks about literature Phélippeaux must have described La Bruyère to Addison? Another contributor to the *Spectator*, Eustace Budgell, translated Theophrastus and knew La Bruyère's book. Dr. Johnson mentions that the French moralist is the source of Addison's effort, but English critical opinion then, and since, has held that La Bruyère wrote without any of the earnestness of the moral reformer. I have indicated, I hope, the hasty error contained in such a judgment.

There is one point, however, on which it must be admitted that Addison shows himself much in advance of his French precursor, or rather perhaps we should consider it a proof of the advantage of English society under Anne over French society under Louis XIV. The delicacy and sympathy with which women are treated in the *Spectator* has no parallel in the "Caractères." In that volume, the chapter "Des Femmes" is perhaps the least agreeable to a sensible reader of to-day. It is crowded with types of pretentious and abnormal womanhood, which it caricatures very effectively. Addison had manifestly studied it, for here we see the origin of his coquettes and prudes, with their "brocade petticoat which rises out of the mines of Peru, and the diamond necklace out of the bowels of Indostan." But what we miss completely in

La Bruyère is that cordial recognition of women as the proper companions of men and the organizers of intelligent society which is so admirably sustained in the *Spectator*. It was Addison, and not La Bruyère, who broke down once for all, and finally, the monkish conception of women as the betrayers of the human species, which had lingered on so detestably from the Middle Ages.

The influence of La Bruyère on Steele is apparent, and may have preceded that on Addison. We may observe that Steele says, in the general preface to the *Tatler*, "the elegance, purity and correctness which appeared in [Mr. Addison's] writings were not so much to my purpose as . . . to rally all those singularities of human life, through the different professions and *characters* in it, which obstruct anything that is truly good and great." The similarity of expression here is certainly not accidental; La Bruyère stood before Steele as a model when he wrote, for instance, in 1709, Mr. Isaac Bickerstaff's "portraits" of Chloe and Clarissa, or the "lucubration" on Deference to Public Opinion. When La Bruyère died, Steele was already an author, and what is more, a moralist. It is impossible not to believe that he had been reading the "Caractères" when it occurred to him that he might procure himself "a most exquisite pleasure," by framing "Characters of Domestic Life."

The ladies may hold it to be an excuse for our French moralist that he was a confirmed and im-

penitent bachelor. He thought that marriage enchained a philosopher, and would have said, in the words of Rudyard Kipling, "He rideth the faster who rideth alone." Boileau, after a visit from La Bruyère, remarked that nature had not consented to make him so agreeable as he wished to be. It seems that he was shy and gauche, and that he strove to conceal these defects by occasional outbursts of a dreadful playfulness. There are stories about his behaviour in the House of Condé, which if they are true seem to carry eccentricity beyond the bounds of what is permitted even to a philosopher. Nevertheless, contemporaries report that, in spite of his plain features and his "look of a common soldier" (a dreadful thing to say in the seventeenth century), the ladies ran after him. I am afraid that when they did so, he repulsed them. He says about love none of the charming things which he says about friendship, such as "To be with those we are fond of, that is enough; to dream, to speak to them, to say nothing to them, to think about them, to think of indifferent things, but in their presence,—all is equally pleasant." Or this: "Pure friendship has a flavour which is beyond the taste of those who are born mediocre." Or again: "There ought to be, deep down in the heart, inexhaustible wells of sorrow in readiness for certain losses." The tenderness of such thoughts as these may surely outweigh the dryness of the portraits of Corinne and Clarice.

The career of our moralist, after the publication

of his single book, was a short one. His startling success as a writer irresistibly pointed him out as a candidate for election to the French Academy, but here he was met by the barbed wire of jealousy and exasperated vanity. He had laughed at too many pretentious mandarins to hope to escape their resentment. At last, in 1693, but alas! at the expense of a vast deal of intrigue on the part of his illustrious protectors, he stormed that reluctant fortress. In his Reception Discourse, he revenged himself on his enemies by firing volley after volley of irony into their ranks, and the august body was beside itself with rage. No pompous Academician, for instance, likes to hear, in the solemn conclave of his colleagues, that he is so Christian and so charitable that "writing well may be said to be among the least of his qualities." La Bruyère summed up his attacks in a preface to the eighth edition of the "Caractères" in 1694. He then retired again to his independence as a crafty old bachelor, and Saint Simon gives us a pleasant snapshot of him in these latest years, "a very straightforward man, capital company, simple, with nothing of the pedant about him, and entirely disinterested."

He remained the man of one book until nearly the close of his life. It is thought that Bossuet, who had always been his great exemplar, urged him to undertake a reply to the heresies of Mme de Guyon and Fénelon, and that so he was dragged into that very painful quarrel. At all events, he started a series of "Dialogues on Quietism," in which

all the extreme doctrines of Molinos and his disciples were examined and ridiculed. On May 8, 1696, La Bruyère dined with Antoine Bossuet, the bishop's elder brother; after dinner he took out the MSS. from his pocket, and read extracts to his host. Two days afterwards, after walking in the garden at Versailles, he had a stroke, and two days after that he died. He had had no premonition of illness, and the rumour went round that the Quietists had poisoned him. His body was exhumed, but of course no trace of poison was to be found. The "Dialogues," revised and completed by the Abbé Elliès du Pin, were published the next year. Their authenticity has been obstinately contested, but, as I confess it seems to me, without excuse. Both external and internal evidence go to prove, I think, that they are substantially the work of La Bruyère, and for those who are not alarmed at theological discussions conducted in rather a profane spirit, they make very good reading.

One last word about our amiable author. His great book remains eminently alive, and wields after two centuries and a half a permanent influence. When you refer to it, you must not expect a logical development of philosophical theory. We do not look to find a system in a book of maxims and portraits. La Bruyère was a moralist, pure and simple; he awakened sensibility, he encouraged refinement, and he exposed the vicious difference which existed around him—and which no one else had seemed to notice—that the possession of more

or fewer pieces of money made between human beings otherwise equal. He had a democratic philosophy which is sometimes that of Mr. Micawber, " Celui-là est riche qui reçoit plus qu'il ne consume; celui-là est pauvre dont la dépense excède la recette." But he is seldom so prosy as this. Let us think of him as one who wished to turn his talent as a painter of still life to the benefit of his nation, and who succeeded in a degree far beyond his own modest hopes.

VAUVENARGUES

VAUVENARGUES

If we had been in Paris on a summer's day in 1744 we might have seen emerge from a modest house in the ungenteel rue du Paon (Peacock Street) a young man of less than twenty-nine years of age. It is improbable that we should have been attracted to him without warning, for though his expression was very pleasant, he was not distinguished-looking, and though he was uncomplaining, his evident air of suffering was painful to witness. He had the gallant bearing of a soldier and a certain noble elegance, but a shade across his forehead testified to the failure of his eyesight, and he shambled along with difficulty on two lame legs. If we followed him he would probably take us slowly to the Garden of the Luxembourg, where it was very unlikely that any one would greet him.

He would presently turn out of the fashionable promenade, to contemplate the poor and the unfortunate. Sometimes he would stop those who seemed most wretched, and would try to share their sorrows, but sympathy on the part of a gentleman was strange, or else there was something in himself which failed to express his tenderness, for he complained that the unfortunate always turned away

from him. If, at the moment of such a repulse, we had addressed him, and had respectfully offered him our sympathy, he would have struggled with his painful shyness, and would have told us that he felt no resentment against those who rejected his help. Nothing hardened his heart, and the lack of response merely doubled his pity. He would assure us, with the pale smile which was the charm of his anæmic countenance, that those who were vicious were so by their misfortune, not their fault, and that of the worst criminals he was persuaded that, if they could, they would "end their days in innocence." With an exquisite and simple politeness he would leave us wondering a little who this pathetic young man, with all the stigmata upon him of poverty and sickness bravely borne, might be; and there would be none to explain to us that it was the Marquis de Vauvenargues, come home a broken man from the wars in Bohemia.

This inconspicuous personage, who glided almost like a ghost through less than thirty-two years of pain and adversity, was not merely the greatest moralist that France produced in the course of the eighteenth century, but was of all the world's writers perhaps the one who has lifted highest the banner of hope and joy in heroism and virtue. In La Rochefoucauld we encountered a representative of the dominant class, the prince-dukes. La Bruyère was a typical bourgeois. In our third example of the moral energy of France we meet with a specimen of the *petite noblesse*, the impoverished country gentle-

men who dragged out a provincial existence in obscurity and ignorance, supported by their pride in a long pedigree. Luc de Clapiers, whose father was raised to the marquisate of Vauvenargues in 1722, was born seven years earlier than that, at Aix in Provence, where his father was mayor. It is a pleasant touch to be told that his father was the only magistrate who did not desert his post when Aix was swept by the plague in 1720. There seems a foreshadowing here of his famous son's high courage. But it seems also certain that there was no appreciation of scholarship or literature in the household. No atmosphere less benevolent to learning can be imagined. The future philosopher went to school at Aix for a little while, and then his weak health was made the excuse for cancelling what was perhaps looked upon as a needless expense. He was thrown upon himself, and what education he secured was the result of his own desultory reading.

Vauvenargues never acquired a knowledge of Greek or even Latin,[1] but when he was about sixteen years of age he came across a book which absolutely transfigured his outlook upon the world and decided the course of his aspirations. This was none less than a translation of the "Lives" of Plutarch, a work which has had a very remarkable moral effect on the Frenchmen of four centuries. We know not which this particular translation was, but it would be pleasant to think it was that made by Amyot

[1] Suard is definite as to this: "Il est mort sans être en état de lire Horace et Tacite dans leur langue."

in 1559. The effect it had on the temperament of Vauvenargues must be told in his own words. He says in a letter to Mirabeau (March 22, 1740)—

"I wept for joy while I read these 'Lives' [of Plutarch]. No night went by but I had spent part of it in talking to Alcibiades, to Agesilas, or to others. I walked in the streets of Rome that I might argue with the Gracchi, and when stones were flung at Cato, there was I to defend him. You remember that when Cæsar wished to pass a law which was too much in favour of the populace, Cato tried to prevent his doing so, and put his hand on Cæsar's mouth to prevent his speaking? These modes of action, so unlike our fashions of to-day, made a deep impression on me."

He attributed to the teaching of Plutarch his introduction to the master-passions of his brief future existence, namely, his devotion to a sense of heroic duty and his determination to live up to the measure of his high calling. In the pages of Plutarch he says that he discovered "la vraie grandeur de notre âme"; here was exposed before him a scene of life illustrated by "virtue without limit, pleasure without infamy, wit without affectation, distinction without vanity, and vices without baseness and without disguise." This boyish appreciation is worthy of our attention, because it contains the future moral teaching of Vauvenargues as in a nutshell. To our great regret, it is the only positive record which survives of the adolescence of this great mind, on whose development we should

so gladly dwell if it were possible. In one of his own beautiful phrases Vauvenargues says, "The earliest days of spring have less charm than the budding virtue of a young man." In his own case those "earliest days" are hopelessly sunken into oblivion.[1]

How harshly his tastes were condemned at home may be judged by an anecdote about his father which occurs in the "Essai sur quelques caractères":—

"Anselme was shocked that his son should show a taste for science. He burnt the young man's papers and books, and when he learned that he had gone to sup with certain men of letters, he threatened to banish him to the country if he persisted in keeping *bad company*. 'Since you are fond of reading,' he said to him, 'why don't you read the history of your own family? You will not find any savants there, but you will find men of the right sort. Do you wish to be the first pedant of your race?'"

There were but two alternatives for a lad of his class who had to make a living, the Church and the Army. For Vauvenargues there could be no question, he was born to be a soldier. At the age of eighteen he entered the King's Regiment as a

[1] We know, at least, that he taught himself to write on the "sedulous ape" system, by imitating Bossuet and Fénelon. He must have been in several respects very much like Robert Louis Stevenson. His modesty led him to distrust his own taste, and it is worthy of notice that the corrections he made to please Voltaire often reduce the vigour of his thought in its original expression. Voltaire—it is beyond conjecture why—cancelled the famous maxim, "Les feux de l'aurore."

second-lieutenant, and he marched into Lombardy under the orders of that illustrious marshal-general, the Duke of Villars, now in his eighty-first year, but still the unquestioned summit of French military genius. The idea of "following Hannibal over the mountains" filled our young philosopher with an enthusiasm beyond his years. He took part in the victories of Parma and Guastalla, and he was probably with Villars at Turin when that indomitable octogenarian died in June 1734. The War of the Polish Succession presently sank into a mere armistice, and until 1736 we dimly perceive Vauvenargues sharing the idle and boring life of the officer who, too poor to retire to Paris, vegetates in some deplorable frontier-garrison of Burgundy or Franche Comté. We know that he was dissipated and idle, for he tells us so, but his confession is marred by no sort of priggishness, and it is very important to insist that this greatest of moralists never exaggerated the capacity of ordinary human virtue. He pretended to no exceptional loftiness in his own conduct; he demanded no excessive sacrifice on the part of others. Suard speaks of the "sweet indulgence" which marked his relations with those with whom he lived, and he tells us that Vauvenargues "gradually rose above the frivolous occupations of his time of life, without ever contracting, in the development of serious ideas, that austerity which commonly accompanies the virtues of youth. . . . Vauvenargues, thrown upon the world directly he ceased to be a child, learned to know men before

it occurred to him to judge them. He saw their weaknesses before he had reflected on their duties; and virtue, when it entered his heart, found there all possible dispositions to indulgence."

" Dispositions to indulgence "—we linger on this phrase, which has an engaging beauty of its own. It distinguishes Vauvenargues at once from all the great French moralists who preceded him, from La Rochefoucauld with his savage cynicism, from Pascal with his contempt of the natural man. Vauvenargues rejected the idea which had so tormented the great spirits of the seventeenth century, that the noblest life was a life of mortification, and he made no demand on the soul to divorce itself from all human interests as being things naturally vile and ignominious. He was to come down to us waving an olive-branch, the most amiable of all idealists, an apostle of tolerance. He says that he " hated scorn of human things." To this we must presently return, but we may pause to note it here, as a faint light thrown over the obscurity of his adolescence.

The Marquis of Mirabeau was the cousin of Vauvenargues and almost exactly his cœval. The discovery of a packet of letters which passed between the young men from the summer of 1737 to that of 1740 has dissipated in some measure the otherwise total darkness which had gathered around the youth of our philosopher. Mirabeau (who was to be the father of the famous orator) was a man of talent, but violent, chimerical and lawless,

" farouche," as he himself put it. Later he was the author of the redoubtable " Ami des Hommes." This prodigal uncle of the Revolution, this dangerous and violent " physiocrate " as he called himself, would seem divided, as pole from pole, from the gently-reasoning, the benevolently-meditative Vauvenargues. Nevertheless, they are seen in warm relation of friendship to each other, and the letters exhibit their characteristics. Mirabeau shamelessly pours out the catalogue of his shifting and venal loves, in confidences which Vauvenargues invariably receives with discretion, unupbraiding, but not volunteering any like confidence in his turn. A single example must be quoted : Mirabeau, wishing to get rid of a mistress of whom he is tired, but who is still devoted to him, writes her a letter of the most studied insolence, cleverly turned, and sends a copy of it, with infinite fatuity, to his friend. Vauvenargues replies that he has read out this letter at dinner to his fellow-officers, who have been greatly diverted by its wit. " But," said Vauvenargues, " we are sorry " (that is to say, of course, Vauvenargues is sorry) " for the poor girl, who shows intelligence, and who loves you." Could anything be a more indulgent, or at the same time a more definite reproof? The germ of the *Réflexions* is found in this passing phrase, so unexpected in a soldier of that time and place.

An anecdote, preserved like a spark of light in the darkness of those early garrison years, takes us a step further. The sentiment of compassion was

scarcely known to the early eighteenth century in France; it was certainly never extended to those unfortunate women who, as Vauvenargues puts it, "watch for young men as evening begins to darken." He was himself accosted on one occasion by a girl, whom he allowed to walk by his side while he gently questioned her. She easily told him of the wretched poverty which had driven her to vice, and Vauvenargues, after trying to revive in her some sentiment of modesty, left her with the gift of a little money. His fellow-officers of the regiment greeted the incident with shouts of mirth: such behaviour was unheard of. Vauvenargues replied: "My friends, you laugh too easily. I am sorry for these poor creatures, obliged to ply such a profession to earn their bread. The world is full of sorrows which wring my heart; if we are to be kind only to those who deserve it, we may never be called upon at all. We must be indulgent to the weak who have more need of support than the virtuous; and we must remember that the errors of the unfortunate are always caused by the harshness of the rich." M. Paléologue, in a very interesting passage, has remarked that we have to wait a hundred years before there is a repetition in French literature of this peculiar mansuetude.

Bearing in mind this capacity for indulgence, for pity, and remembering how little it was conceived in the age he lived in, we may look forward a moment to recognize that in his whole teaching Vauvenargues differs from other moralists, but particularly from

his great predecessors in France, in that he has a constructive object. He wishes exceedingly to help the unfortunate to live happily, easily and profitably, and he regards almost the whole human race as more or less unhappy. His desire, therefore, is not, as that of the seventeenth-century moralists had been, to put human egotism in the pillory and to pelt it with rotten eggs, but so far as possible to encourage and affirm a decent, self-respecting egotism. Vauvenargues finds the lock of life to be rusty; he touches it with the oiled feather of his advice, so that the key may turn without resistance, and without noise. He does not profess to strive after perfection in conduct, but after improvement, and he is most careful never to recommend violent means or an excessive austerity; nor does he condemn or scold, even when his own humanity is most affronted, but he tries to induce every one to make the best of his relations with other men during the fugitive and frail duration of their common existence. If he hated anything—in his universal benignity—Vauvenargues hated a rigid puritanism. In one place he says, " We believe no longer in witches, and yet there are people who still believe in Calvin ! "

Vauvenargues was twenty-six years of age when the war of the Austrian Succession broke out, and swept him into military action. He was vegetating in garrison at Metz when the armies of Marshal de Belle-Isle, the gallant and thrice-unfortunate, streamed eastward into Germany and carried our philosopher with them. The Regiment of the King,

of which Vauvenargues was an officer, reached Bohemia in July 1741. In a night attack of extraordinary rapidity and audacity Prague was captured, and Vauvenargues took a personal part in this adventure, which must have cast fuel on the fire of his rising military ambition. But the conduct of war is all composed of startling ups and downs, and at the height of the successes of the French, their luck abandoned them. Relieved by no reinforcements and pressed hard by famine, the army of Belle-Isle could no longer hold Prague, and on the night of December 16–17, 1742, began the retreat from Bohemia which is one of the most noted disasters of the eighteenth century. Nine days later, what remained of the French army arrived at Egra, but after a march through thick fog over frozen ground, without food, without shelter, in a chaotic frenzy of despair.

Vauvenargues was one of those who never recovered from the agony of the retreat from Prague. Both his legs were frost-bitten, so that for the remainder of his life he was lame; his eyesight was permanently impaired; and he appears to have sown the seeds of the pulmonary disease which was to carry him off five years later. But his tender heart endured what were still severer pangs from the sufferings and death of those of his companions for whom he had the greatest regard. Among these the first place was held by Hippolyte de Seyres, whose figure pervades the earliest developments of the genius of Vauvenargues. De Seyres was a

lieutenant in the philosopher's regiment. He was only eighteen years of age, and Vauvenargues felt for him the interest of an elder brother and the affection of a devoted friend. We can trace the progress of the sentiment, in which are fully revealed for the first time the peculiar qualities of our author's mind. He does not conceal from himself the weaknesses of the character of De Seyres, he blames him for his lack of suppleness, of simplicity of manner, of self-confidence. He found in him a proud and delicate spirit which exaggerated its own frailties and shrank morbidly from their consequences. He was anxious that the spirit of the young man should not be debased by low associations; he did not think the slightly older officers who surrounded De Seyres to be wholesome companions for him. The lad displayed a lack of moral force; he hoped to succeed less by his own exertions than by the favour of others; he was in despair over his own faults without having the energy to correct them. It is in writing about De Seyres that Vauvenargues first defines his central axiom, that the only sources of success are virtue, genius and patience. He observed the lack of them all in De Seyres, and his incapacity for expansion made his case the more difficult to handle. "Son cœur est toujours serré," Vauvenargues exclaims. But he nourished a deep and ever-deepening affection for this sensitive lad, and became desirous, almost passionately desirous, to lead him up to better things from out of the mediocrity of his present associations.

It appears certain to me that it was the study expended on the character of Hippolyte de Seyres and the shock received by his dreadful death which gave the earliest expansion to the genius of Vauvenargues and left their definite mark on his writings. I do not know why this all-important episode seems to have attracted so little of the attention of those who have written about him. The "Conseils à un Jeune Homme," which was evidently finished in 1743, is the earliest complete work of Vauvenargues which we possess; it contains in embryo the whole of his teaching as a moralist, and it was written for the guidance of young De Seyres. On the other hand, I think that Gilbert and other editors are mistaken in attributing the "Discours sur la Gloire" to the same date and occasion; it seems to me much later in style, and addressed to a very different person. The note of the address to De Seyres is accurately given in the exquisite essay entitled "Love of the Noble Passions." But it appears that the edifice built up by the tender affection of Vauvenargues was rased to the ground in December 1742. The young friend so passionately guarded, so anxiously watched, died under his eyes in the course of the terrible retreat over the icy passes of Bohemia, a victim to the united agony of famine, cold and fatigue. Vauvenargues wrote an "Éloge" on his young friend, which betrays something of the hysterical agitation of his own soul. Here is a fragment of this strange document—

"Open, ye formidable sepulchres! Solitary

phantoms, speak, speak! What unconquerable silence! O sad abandonment! O terror! What hand is it which holds all nature paralyzed beneath its pressure? O thou hidden and eternal Being, deign to dissipate the alarm in which my feeble soul is plunged. The secret of Thy judgments turns my timid heart to ice. Veiled in the recesses of Thy being, Thou dost forge fate and time, and life and death, and fear and joy, and deceitful and credulous hope. Thou dost reign over the elements and over hell in revolt. The smitten air shudders at Thy voice. Redoubtable judge of the dead, take pity upon my despair."

This is a voice we hear, so far as I remember, nowhere else in the French literature of the eighteenth century. There is a certain accent of Bossuet in it; it is still more like the note which a group of English poets were striking. It may really seem to us an extraordinary coincidence that the "Éloge" on Hippolyte de Seyres should belong to the very same year, 1743, which saw the publication of Blair's "Grave" and Young's "Night Thoughts."

The rhetorical turn of the sentences I have just read was not habitual with Vauvenargues; it was in this case the mask worn by the intensity of his feeling, but he confesses in an early letter, "I like sometimes to string big words together, and to lose myself in a period; I make a jest of it." But after this outburst of panic grief in 1743 we see no more trace of such a tendency to eloquence. He became more and more completely himself, that is to say,

very simple intellectually, in a pedantic age. He adopted, indeed, a certain gravity at which we may now smile; he did not approve of fairy-tales and fables, on the ground that anything which came between direct truth and the receptive mind of man was a disadvantage. "The disease of our age is to want to make jokes about everything," he complains.

To poor Vauvenargues life was not a laughing matter. His health had been completely ruined by the disastrous campaigns in Austria, and by the hardships of garrison life; and he was feeling more and more sharply that pinch of genteel poverty which is the hardest of all to bear. But if he never laughed, this martyr of the soul never ceased to smile. His perpetual sufferings did not affect his gentle sobriety of conversation. Those whose privilege it was to see Vauvenargues during these last years of his brief existence are united in their report of his magnanimity. Voltaire wrote, "I have always found him the most unfortunate of human beings and the most tranquil." He was notable for his "indulgent goodness," his "constant peace," his "justice of heart," his "rectitude of soul." His conversation, so Marmontel reports to us, had something more animated, more delicate, than even his divine writings. The same acute observer noted that in the heart of Vauvenargues, when he reflected upon the misery of mankind, pity took the place of indignation and hatred. Sensitive, serene, compassionate, affable, he tried to conceal from his friends as much as possible his own pain, and even

when it was evident that he suffered most, no one dared to be melancholy in his presence.

In the fleeting and impoverished life of Vauvenargues his friendships were the main adventure. We have mentioned a name which is too frequently the object of malignity on English lips, the name of Voltaire. No one would pretend that the multiform energy of this giant of literature did not take some unseemly directions and several unlovely shapes. But the qualities of Voltaire must, in the eyes of any unbiassed observer, vastly overtop his defects. If, however, we wish to see Voltaire at his best, we must contemplate him in relation to our soldier-philosopher. As soon as his health had recovered a little from the horror of the Bohemian campaign, Vauvenargues took the step of writing to Voltaire, then a stranger, for his opinion on that crying question, the relative greatness of Corneille and of Racine, a question to all Frenchmen like that between predestination and free-will to Milton's rebel angels. This was towards the end of 1743, when Voltaire, who had reached his fiftieth year, was recognised as the first living historian and critic in France, and had been recalled to court through the good offices of Mme du Châtelet. It was, no doubt, at a happy moment that Vauvenargues' random letter arrived. Voltaire responded with ardour; Vauvenargues quickly became to him, as Marmontel says, what Plato was to Socrates, and nothing in the long life of Voltaire shows him in a more charming light than does his devotion to the

young friend whom he called "the sweet hope of the remainder of my days." After the death of the philosopher, Voltaire wrote a brief, but invaluable, account of their relations, which had lasted, without a cloud, until the death of Vauvenargues.

He reminded Voltaire of Pascal, whose "incurable disease was consoled by study," but the elder friend noted a striking distinction; the eloquence of Pascal was fiery and imperious, that of Vauvenargues was "insinuating." The powerful physical force of Voltaire was softened by the suffering of his young companion, for whom "nature had poured out large draughts of hemlock," and who, "while all his body sank into dissolution, preserved in spirit that perfect tranquillity which the pure alone enjoy." Although Vauvenargues was twenty years younger than his friend, Voltaire succumbed to the gravity of his demeanour; like the fellow-officers at Arras or at Metz, we smile to find him addressing Vauvenargues as *mon père*. One of the philosopher's maxims is, "Great thoughts proceed from the heart," and Voltaire in a note has added, "In writing this, though he knew it not, he painted his own portrait." He found in Vauvenargues "the simplicity of a timid child," and it seems that he had a difficulty in overcoming his modesty so far as to make him write down those Reflections which are now placed for ever among the masterpieces of French literature. It is to Voltaire that we owe the fact that Vauvenargues found resolution enough to become an author.

A typical instance of the mixture of courage and tact in the young author is to be found in the attitude which he took up towards Voltaire with regard to the Marquise de Pompadour, without in the least offending his tempestuous friend. That remarkable young lady, then still known as la petite Étioles, had succeeded in catching the King's eye, and was soaring into the political heavens like a rocket, carrying, among other incongruous objects, the genius of Voltaire in her glittering train. Voltaire must have boasted to his young friend that his fortune was made. Vauvenargues surprisingly expresses in his reply the evil which must be done by great authors who flatter vice and think to conceal its corruption by heaping flowers over a lie. The incident is important for us, because it led Vauvenargues, thus disappointed in Voltaire as he had been disappointed in Mirabeau, to examine into the sources of the low moral condition of the age. He attributed it to " le mépris de la gloire," and he set himself to define this quality and to impress it, with all the force of repetition, on the dulled consciences of his contemporaries.

It is extremely difficult, it is well-nigh impossible, to find an equivalent in English for the word " gloire." It is a French conception, and one to which our language does not readily, or gracefully, lend itself. In the mind of Vauvenargues the idea of " gloire " took the central place, and we may form an intelligent conception of the meaning he stamped upon the word, by repeating some of his axioms.

He says: "The flush of dawn is not so lovely as the earliest experiences of *gloire*. *Gloire* makes heroes beautiful." Again: "Nothing is so essential as renown, and nothing so surely gives renown as merit; these are things that reason itself has united, and why should we distinguish true *gloire* from merit, which is the source of it, and of which it is the proof?" This moral union of merit, glory and renown, in triple splendour revolving round each other, was the main object of Vauvenargues' contemplation, and he admits that the central passion of his life was "l'amour de la gloire." What, then, is the exact meaning of "la Gloire," which the dictionaries superficially translate by "glory,"—a very different thing?

Vauvenargues starts a new conception of the value of self-esteem, or rather of the desire of being esteemed by others. The seventeenth century had poured its vials of contempt over the *amour-propre* of mankind, and no doubt that had led to a corresponding decline in the energy of the nation. Pascal had severely ridiculed the vanity which he says is anchored in the heart of man, and he actually mocks at the idea of a desire for renown; expressing his astonishment that even philosophers have the fatuity to wish for fame. Vauvenargues is probably thinking of Pascal when he says that those who dilate upon the inevitable nothingness of human glory would feel vexation if they had to endure the open contempt of a single individual. Men are proud of little things—of dancing well or even of

skating gracefully, or of still meaner accomplishments, yet those very persons despise real renown. "But us," he says in one of his noble outbursts, "but us it excites to labour and virtue." We note, then, at once that the *amour-propre* of the seventeenth century, the sentiment against which we saw the most burning arrows of La Rochefoucauld directed, was not the source of Vauvenargues' desire of glory; that with him renown was not a matter of egotistic satisfaction, but of altruistic stimulus, awakening in others, by a happy rivalry, sentiments of generosity and self-sacrifice which might redeem society and the dying world of France. And this may perhaps at this point be observed as the centre of his action, namely the discovery that a wholesome desire for fame proceeds not from our self-satisfaction, but from our profound sense of emptiness, of imperfection.

How needful the lesson was, no one who examines the social history of the first half of the eighteenth century can doubt. Without falling into errors of a Puritanic kind, we cannot fail to see that opinion and action alike had become soft, irresolute, superficial; that strong views of duty and piety and justice were half indulged in, half sneered at, and not at all acted upon. The great theologians who surrounded Bossuet, the Eagle of Meaux, had died one by one, and had left successors who were partly pagan, partly atheist. Art and literature tripped after the flowered skirts of the emancipated Duchess of Maine. Looking round the world of France in

1746, Vauvenargues could but cry, like a preacher in the wilderness, "we have fallen into decadence, into moral disuetude," but he cried without anger, remembering that "still the love of *gloire* is the invisible soul of all those who are capable of any virtue."

It was a critical moment in the history of France. After the long and painful wars of Louis XIV. the army had become unpopular; it was the fashion to sneer at it. The common soldiers were considered, and often were, the offscourings of the community. The officers, who had left their homes too soon, in most cases, to acquire the rudiments of education, were bored with garrison life, and regretted Paris, which they made every excuse to regain. They affected to have no curiosity about military science, and to talk "army shop" was the worst of bad form. Those who were poor lived and grumbled in their squalor; those who were rich gave themselves up to sinful extravagance. There was no instinctive patriotism in any section of the troops. What pleasure can a man have in being a soldier if he possesses neither talent for war, nor the esteem of his men, nor a taste for glory? It is Vauvenargues himself, who had seen all classes of officers, who asks that question. From his "Réflexions" of 1746 a chapter on "Our Armies at the Present Moment" was omitted, and not published in its proper sequence until long after his death. No doubt its searching exposure of the rot in the military state of France was the cause of this suppression.

"Courage," he says in this deleted chapter of his book, "courage, which our ancestors admired as the first of virtues, is now generally regarded as a popular error." Those few officers who still desire to see their country glorious, are forced to retire into civil life because they cannot endure a condition in which there is no reward but shame for a man of courage and ambition.

These were prominent among the considerations which filled the mind of Vauvenargues when, at the age of twenty-nine, he saw himself driven out of military life by the rapid aggravation of ill-health. His thoughts turned to diplomacy. He greatly admired the writings of Sir William Temple, on whom he may have partly modelled his own style as an essayist; he dreamed of becoming an ambassador of the same class, known, as Temple was, "by their writings no less than by their immortal actions." But his inexorable bad luck followed him in this design. A pathetic letter to the King remained unanswered, and so did another to Amelot, the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

After waiting a long time he wrote again to Amelot, and this second letter is highly characteristic of the temper and condition of Vauvenargues—

"MONSEIGNEUR,

"I am painfully distressed that the letter which I had the honour of writing to you, as well as that which I took the liberty of asking you to forward to the King, have not been able to arrest your

attention. It is not, perhaps, surprising that a minister so fully occupied as you are should not find time to examine such letters; but, Monseigneur, will you permit me to point out to you that it is precisely this moral impossibility for a gentleman, who has no claim but zeal, to reach his master, which leads to that discouragement that is noticeable in all the country nobility, and which extinguishes all emulation?

"I have passed, Monseigneur, my youth far from all worldly distractions, in order to prepare myself for the species of employment for which it was my belief that my temperament designed me; and I was bold enough to think that so concentrated an effort would place me at least on a level with those who depend for all their fortune upon their intrigues and upon their pleasures. It overwhelms me, Monseigneur, to discover that the confidence which I had based mainly on the love of my duty, should be so disappointed. My health no longer permitting me to continue my services in the war, I have written to M. the Duke de Biron to beg him to appoint my successor. I could not, in a situation so piteous, refrain from informing you of my despair. Pardon me, Monseigneur, if it has led me into any extravagance of expression.

"I am, etc."

To this last appeal the Minister for Foreign Affairs did respond in a brief and perfunctory note, promising to find an occasion of bringing the talents

of Vauvenargues to the notice of the King, but nothing resulted. Vauvenargues had been living in a dream of military glory, and had been thirsting to serve his country in the loftiest and most responsible capacities. His very physical appearance now completed the bankruptcy of his wishes, for he was attacked with the smallpox, which disfigured him so badly that, to use his own expression, "it prevented his soul from appearing in his features." Thus without fortune, or profession, without hope for the future, half-blind, with gangrened limbs that tottered under his feeble body, Vauvenargues started on the steadily downward path which was to lead in less than four years to his grave. History presents to us no more dolorous figure of physical and social failure, nor a more radiant example of moral success.

The alternative now presented itself of a wretched solitude in the castle of his Provençal ancestors, or a garret, perhaps even more wretched, but certainly far less solitary, in Paris. In either case it would be necessary to relinquish all the luxuries, all the comforts of life. He chose to finish his suffering years in Paris, and in humble furnished rooms in the street of the Peacock, where he was consoled by the visits of Voltaire and Marmontel. We find him settled there in May 1745, and seven months later there crept into circulation an anonymous volume of moral essays, which was absolutely ignored by the literary world of France. We do not appreciate to the full the Calvary which Vauvenargues so meekly mounted, unless we realize that

to all his other failures was added a complete disregard of his ideas by the literary public of his own day. He died unknown, save by two or three friends, having never experienced anything but languor, disappointment and obscurity. Under the pseudonym of Clazomène, just before his death, he drew a picture of his own fortune and character which proves that he had no illusion about himself, and which yet contains not a murmur against the injustice of fate nor a breath of petulance or resentment. "Let no one imagine," this portrait closes, "that Clazomène would exchange his wretchedness for the prosperity of weak men; fortune may sport with the wisdom of brave souls, but it has no power to subdue their courage."

It is time, however, to examine the actual compositions of our author.[1] Until his friendship with Voltaire began, Vauvenargues had not given much attention to verse, but he now began a series of critical essays on the poets. He says, in the course of these "Réflexions," that what little he knew of poetry he owed to M. de Voltaire. His remarks on this subject, however, are more independent than he would give us to suppose, and they are always worthy of attention because they illustrate the

[1] The writings of Vauvenargues exist in a confusion which is not likely to be ever remedied, for the bulk of his MSS. were burned during the Commune in May 1871. But much gratitude is owing to Suard (1806) and Gilbert (1857) for their pious labours. A variorum edition might even yet be attempted, and although not complete, might at least be final.

moral attitude of Vauvenargues himself. He was not embarrassed by tradition in advancing along his road through the masterpieces of literature. He was always an amateur, never a man in bondage to the "authorities;" he seems, indeed, to have avowed a dislike for general reading: "Pascal avait peu lu, ainsi que Malebranche," was his excuse. In the case of Pascal, we may question the fact, but it is recorded that when at last Malebranche was persuaded to read Descartes' "Traité de l'homme," it excited him so violently as to bring on palpitation of the heart. Such are the dangers of a retarded study of the classics. Vauvenargues was no less inflammable. He met with the tragedies of Racine at a moment when the reputation of that poet had sunk to its lowest point, and, totally indifferent to the censure of the academical sanhedrim, he extolled him as a master-anatomist of the human heart.

In considering the observations of Vauvenargues with regard to poets, we must bear in mind that he and his contemporaries did not seek from poetry what we require in the twentieth century. The critics of the early eighteenth century in France talked about Homer and Virgil, but what they really admired were Ariosto and Pope. Voltaire, the greatest of them, considered the "épopée heroï-comique" the top-stone of modern practical effort; we know what astonishing feats he was himself guilty of in that species of architecture. But his whole teaching and practice tended towards an

identity of speech between prose and verse, the prosodical pattern or ornament being the sole feature which distinguished the latter from the former. His own poetry, when it was not fugitive or satiric, was mainly philosophical, that is to say, it did not stray beyond the confines of logic and wit. At the same time, Voltaire was an energetic protagonist for verse, and he did very much to prevent the abandonment of this instrument at a time when prose, in such hands as those of Montesquieu and Buffon, was manifestly in the ascendant. He earnestly recommended the cultivation of a form in which precision of thought and elegance of language were indispensable, and he employed it in tragedies which we find it impossible to read, but which enchanted the ear and fancy of Vauvenargues.

The taste of the age of Louis XV. affected to admire Corneille to the disadvantage of all other rivals, and Voltaire was not far from blaming Vauvenargues for his "extreme predilection" for Racine. But Vauvenargues, with unexpected vivacity, took up the cudgels, and accused the divine Corneille of "painting only the austere, stern, inflexible virtues," and of falling into the affectation of mistaking bravado for nobility, and declamation for eloquence. He is extremely severe on the faults of the favourite tragedian, and he blames Corneille for preferring the gigantic to the human, and for ignoring the tender and touching simplicity of the Greeks. It is from the point of view of the moralist that these strictures are now important; they show

us that Vauvenargues in his reiterated recommendation of virtue and military glory did not regard those qualities from the Cornelian point of view, which he looked upon as fostering a pompous and falsely "fastueux" conception of life. He blamed Corneille's theatrical ferocity in terms so severe that Voltaire called the passage "a detestable piece of criticism" and ran his blue pencil through it. No doubt the fact is that Vauvenargues saw in the rhetoric of Corneille a parody of his own sentiments, carried to the verge of rodomontade.

The publications of Vauvenargues during his lifetime come under two categories. His "Introduction à la Connaissance de l'Esprit Humain" is a short book, and it is also a fragment. The author had begun to collect notes for it during his Bohemian campaign, in 1741; but "those passions which are inseparable from youth, and ceaseless physical infirmity, brought on by the war, interrupted my studies," he says. Voltaire has expressed his amazement that under such piteous conditions, Vauvenargues had the fortitude to pursue them at all. There seems to be a change apparent in the object he put before him; he set out, like Locke, to write an essay on the Human Understanding, but he ended by putting together a chain of maxims. He quoted Pascal, who had said, "All good maxims are in the world; we have only got to apply them," but though Vauvenargues takes this dictum as his text he refutes it. He says that maxims originally "good," in Pascal's sense, may have grown sleepy in popular

use, and may have ceased to act, so that we ought to rid ourselves of conventional prejudice and go to the fountain-head, to try all spirits, in fact, and find out what spirits really are of God. When Vauvenargues began to reflect, he was astonished at the inexactitude and even self-contradiction of the philosophical language of his day. He was not, and probably never would have become, what we understand now as a philosopher. He was a moralist, pure and simple, and had no more relation with men like Descartes or Berkeley than a rousing revivalist preacher has with a regius professor of Theology.

The only thing which really interested Vauvenargues was the social duty of man, and to discover what that is he attempted to define morals, politics and religion. He had an intense desire for clear guidance, and he waited for the heavenly spark to fall. He said to himself, before he made it plain to others, that if we are not guided by *truth*, we fall into the pit. There was a certain childishness in his attitude in this matter, for he was inclined to regard abstract truth as the only one worthy of pursuit. That he was advancing in breadth of view is shown by the fact that he cancelled in the second edition of his book a whimsical passage in which he urged people who were studying conchology, to throw away their shells, asking them to consider " whether glory is but a name, virtue all a mistake, and law nothing else than a phantom." The " Introduction " is all written in this spirit;

it is a passionate appeal to the French nation to leave mean and trivial pursuits, and to live for pure and passionate ideals, for glory gained by merit, and as the reward of solid and strenuous effort.

Vauvenargues' attitude to the English moralists has not been sufficiently examined. So far as is known he never visited this country, although he desired to do so. In one of his letters he speaks of intending to consult a famous oculist in London, but this project was not carried out; his poverty doubtless prevented it. Whether he knew English is not certain, but he appears to have read Temple and Locke, possibly in the original, and a reference to a remarkable English contemporary appears to have hitherto escaped observation. In the "Introduction à la connaissance de l'esprit humain," he speaks of a writer who has argued that private vices are public benefits, and he attempts to show that this is a fallacy. He returns, less definitely, to the same line of thought in the "Discours sur la gloire," where he denies that vice has any part in stimulating social action. It is strange that no one, so far as I know, has observed this proof that Vauvenargues was acquainted with the celebrated paradox of Bernard Mandeville, whose "Fable of the Bees" was in 1747 continuing to cause so scandalous a sensation, and was still so completely misunderstood. There seems, occasionally, a trace of the idealism of Shaftesbury in the colour of Vauvenargues' phrase, but on this it would be dangerous to insist.

His own views, however, were more emphatically defined, and more directly urged, in the other contribution to literature published by Vauvenargues in his lifetime, the "Réflexions sur divers sujéts." Here he abandons the attempt at forming a philosophical system, and admits that his sole object is "to form the hearts and the manners" of his readers. Perhaps the most penetrating of all his sentences is that in which he says: "If you possess any passion which you feel to be noble and generous, be sure you foster it." This was diametrically opposed to all the teaching of the seventeenth-century moralists who had preceded him, and also had taught us that we should mistrust our passions and disdain our enthusiasms. To see how completely Vauvenargues rejected the Christian doctrine of the utter decrepitude and hopeless inherent badness of the human mind, we have but to gather some of his sparse thoughts together. He says, in defiance of Pascal and the Jansenists, "Mankind is the only source of our happiness, outside that there is nothing." Again, "As it is the heart, in most people, that doubts, so when once the heart is converted, all is done; it leads them along the path to virtue." He deprecated the constant checking and blaming of children which was part of the system of education then in vogue; he declared that it sapped the confidence of the young, their inherent sense of virtue; and he exclaimed, "Why does no one dream of training children to be original, bold and independent?"

Those who knew Vauvenargues recognized in the purity and sweetness and severity of his teaching the record of his own conduct. Marmontel speaks of the "tender veneration" with which all the more serious of his early comrades in the army regarded him. In his works we trace the result of a curious thing, experience superseding, taking the place of, education. "He observed the weaknesses of mankind before he had time to reflect upon their duties," says a contemporary. His mind, although assaulted by such a crowd of disadvantages, remained calm, and free from prejudice; remained gently indulgent to human weakness on the one hand, rigid in allegiance to his ideal pursuit of "la gloire" on the other. The noble movements of his mind were native, not acquired, and he had not been hardened or exasperated by the pressure of a mortifying theology. He does not take so exalted or so pitiless an attitude as the classic seventeenth-century moralist. Pascal scourges the mass of humanity down a steep place into the sea; Vauvenargues takes each wanderer by the hand, and leads him along the primrose path.

A singular charm in the French character lies in its gift for composite action. Frenchmen prefer marching towards victory in a body to a scattered effort of individual energy. It was part of the constructive genius of Vauvenargues to find the aim and joy of life in a combination of sentiment and action, in a community of rivals amiably striving for the crown with fellowmen of like instincts and

of like experience. He was of all moralists the least solitary; he had spent his life as a soldier among soldiers, among those who did their best, in the midst of hardships, to live a life of pleasure without reflection. He was no prig, but he had formed the habit of giving fatherly counsel which was much beyond his years. He observes that "the advice of old men is like winter sunshine that gives out light without warmth," but that the words of a wise and genial young man may radiate heat and glow. His own advice, given first to his fellow-officers, then to a circle of literary friends, then to France so long as her classic literature finds readers, was identical. He hated conscientious subterfuges which equalize good and evil. He looked upon "gloire" and "vertu" as the two great motive forces of a sane and beneficent life. In this he was unique; Voltaire notes that Vauvenargues soared, in an age of mediocrities, *un siècle des petitesses*, by his refusal to adopt the spirit of the world. He was a puritan of the intelligence, and for the ideal of Sully or Villars he put up the ideal of Oliver Cromwell.

The moral grandeur and spiritual force of Vauvenargues' philosophy demanded in the disciple a constant exercise of energy and will. Faith inspired by effort was to be pursued through sacrifice to the utmost limits of endurance, and with no ultimate reward but *gloire*. This was, however, modified, as it is in the most strenuous direction of character in the Frenchmen of to-day, by an illuminating humanity. Lofty as was the aim of

Vauvenargues, nothing could have been more tender than his practice. We are told that the expression in the eyes of a sick animal, the moan of a wounded deer in the forest, moved him to compassion. He carried this tolerance into human affairs, for he was pre-eminently a human being; "the least of citizens has a right to the honours of his country." He set a high moral value on courtesy, and exposed, as a fallacy, the pretence that to be polite is to lack sincerity. His disposition was easy-going, although his intellect was such a high-flyer; in pagan times he would have believed in ridiculous divinities rather than set himself up as an atheist. He did not believe that excess of knowledge gives firmness to the judgment, and he remarks that the opulence of learned men often leads to more errors than the poverty of those who depend on the native virtues of instinct and experience. He has phrases which seem meant to condemn the mechanical emptiness of the modern German system of *kultur*.

Full of ardour for all that is beautiful and good, tortured by disease and pinched by poverty, but never allowing his personal misfortunes to affect his view of life, or to cloud his vision of the trinity of heavenly lights, *mérite*, *vertu*, *gloire*, Vauvenargues pursued his painful life in the Street of the Peacock. He knew his feebleness, but he refused to let it depress him; "labour to get *gloire* is not lost," he said, "if it tends to make us worthy of it." In his curious mixture of simplicity and acuteness, in his

gravity and ardour, he was morally just like the best types which this great war has produced, he is like Paul Lintier in France, like Julian Grenfell among ourselves, meeting the worst blows of fate with serenity and almost with ecstasy, with no shadow of indignation or rebellion. Some posthumous reflections have let us into the secret that, as the shadows darkened around him, he occasionally gave way, if not to despair, yet to depression, and permitted himself to wonder whether all his effort in the cause of manliness and virtue had been useless. He had not awakened the sleepers in France; he doubted that his voice would ever reach them; he asked himself whether all his effort had not been in vain. This was the natural inner weakness consequent on his physical state; he gave no outward sign of it. Marmontel, who watched his last hours with enthusiastic affection, says that, "In his company we learned how to live,—and how to die." He lay like Socrates, surrounded by his friends, talking and listening to the last; he astonished them by the eloquence and gravity of his discourse. His latest recorded utterance was, "Fortune may sport with the wisdom of those who are courageous, but it has no power to bend their courage." Gently but firmly refusing the importunities of the Church, Vauvenargues was released from his life-in-death on May 28, 1747, in his thirty-second year.

You will not find in the pages of Vauvenargues a distinct revival of that passion for the very soil

of France, " la terre sainte, la douce France," which inspired the noble " Chanson de Roland " and has been so strongly accentuated in the recent struggle for Alsace-Lorraine. But he recalled to the memory of a generation which had grown densely material the forgotten ideal of France as the champion of chivalry. We must not forget that we possess in the writings of Vauvenargues merely the commencements of reflection, the first fruit of a life which was broken before its summer was complete. But we find in his teaching, and in that of no other moralist of the early eighteenth century, the insistence on spiritual courage as the necessary opposite to brutal force and mere materialism. He connected that high ambition, that craving for *la gloire*, with all pure and elevated things, with the art and literature, with the intelligence and beauty of the French creative mind. He recommended, in that gray hour of European dulness, a fresh ornament to life, a scarlet feather, a *panache*, as our French friends say. And the gay note that he blew from his battered clarion was still sounding last year in the heroic resistance of the forts of Verdun.

THE GALLANTRY OF FRANCE

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THE spirit displayed by the young French officers in this war deserves to be compared in many essential respects with that which is blazoned in the glorious "Chanson de Roland." It is interesting to remember that during the long years in which the direct influence of that greatest of medieval epics was obscured, it was chiefly known through the paraphrase of it executed in German by the monk Konrad in the twelfth century. Many years ago, Gaston Paris pointed out the curious fact that Konrad completely modified the character of the "Chanson de Roland" by omitting all expressions of warlike devotion to "la douce France," and by concentrating the emotion of the poem on its religious sentiment. But the real theme of the "Chanson de Roland," as we know now, was the passionate attachment of the heroes to the soil of France; "ils étaient poussés par l'amour de la patrie, de l'empereur français leur seigneur, de leur famille, et surtout de la gloire."

It is a remarkable instance of German "penetration" that in the paraphrase of the "Chanson de Roland" which Germany so long foisted upon Europe, these elements were successfully effaced.

There was a sort of poetical revenge, therefore, in the attitude of those who answered the challenge of Germany in the true spirit of Roland and Oliver.

We have seen that Vauvenargues—to whose memory the mind incessantly reverts in contemplation of the heroes of this war—says in one of his "Maximes"—written nearly two centuries ago—"The earliest days of spring have less charm than the budding virtue of a young man." No figure of 1914 exemplifies this quality of grace more surprisingly than Jean Allard (who called himself in literature Méeus). He was only twenty-one and a half when he was killed at Pierrepont, at the very beginning of the war, but he was already one of the promising figures of his generation. Allard was looked upon as an incipient Admirable Crichton; he was a brilliant scholar, an adroit and multiform athlete, the soul of wit and laughter, the centre of a group of adoring admirers. This sparkling poet was suddenly transformed by the declaration of war into the sternest of soldiers. His poem, called "Demain," created, or rather expressed, the patriotic passion which was simultaneously evoked all over France; it is really a lesser "Marseillaise." Not less popular, but more elaborate and academic, is Allard's aviation poem, "Plus haut toujours!"—an extraordinary vision of the flight and ecstasy and tragic death of a solitary airman. We may notice that in this, and many other verses describing recent inventions of science, the young French poets

contrive to be very lucid and simple in their language, and to avoid that display of technical verbiage which deforms too many English experiments in the same class.

It is not, however, so much by his writings, which are now collected in two, or perhaps three, little volumes, that Allard-Méeus strikes the imagination of a foreign spectator, as by his remarkable attitude. From the first, this lad of twenty-one exemplified and taught the value of a chivalrous behaviour. In the face of events, in that corruption of all which could make the martial spirit seem noble, that Germany has forced upon the world, this attitude of young French officers at the very opening of the war is pathetic, and might even lend itself, if we were disposed for mirth, to an ironic smile. But it should be recorded and not forgotten. It was Allard who revived the etiquette of going to battle dressed as sprucely as for a wedding. We shall do well to recollect the symbolic value which the glove holds in legends of medieval prowess. When the dying Roland, under the pine-trees, turns to the frontier of Spain, he offers, as a dying soldier, his glove to God—

"Pur ses pecchiez deu purofrid son guant."

Allard-Méeus at St. Cyr made all the young officers swear that they would not go into battle except in white gloves and with their *képi* adorned with the *casoar*, the red and white dress-plume. "Ce serment, bien français, est aussi élégant que

téméraire," he said, and the rest followed him with acclamation. He was one of the first French officers to fall in battle, at the head of his infantry, and his mother was presented by the regiment with his *casoar* and his gloves, worn at the moment of his death, on August 22, 1914, and stained with his blood. Allard offers a fugitive but typical specimen of the splendour of French sentiment in the first flush of its enthusiasm.

On March 26, 1917, the Société des Gens de Lettres in Paris held a solemn assembly under the presidency of M. Pierre Decourcelle to commemorate those authors who, during the present war, have fallen in the service of France. Touching and grave in the extreme was the scene, when, before a crowded and throbbing audience, the secretary read the name of one young writer after another, pausing for the president to respond by the words " Mort au champ d'honneur ! " In each case there followed a brief silence more agitating in its emotion than any eloquence could be.

The great number of young men of high intellectual promise who were killed early in this war is a matter for grave and painful reflection. Especially in the first months of the autumn of 1914 the holocaust was terrible. There was no restraining the ardour of the young, who sought their death in a spirit of delirious chivalry, each proud to be the Iphigenia or the Jephtha's Daughter of a France set free. It has been noted since that the young generation, born about 1890, had been

prepared for the crisis in a very significant way. The spiritual condition of these grave and magnificent lads resembled nothing that had been seen before, since the sorrows of 1870. They gave the impression of being dedicated. As we now read their letters, their journals, their poems, we are astonished at the high level of moral sentiment which actuated them all. There is often even a species of rapturous detachment which seems to lift them into a higher sphere than that of vain mortality. Examples might be given by the sheaf, but it suffices here to quote a letter from the youthful Léo Lantil, who was killed early in 1915, in one of the obscure battles of Champagne. He says, in writing to his parents, shortly before his death, "All our sacrifice will be of sweet savour if it leads to a really glorious victory and brings more light to human souls." It was this Léo Lantil, dying in his twenty-fifth year, whose last words were "Priez pour la France, travaillez pour la France, haussez-la!"

A story is told by M. Henri Bordeaux which illustrates the impression made by these young soldiers. A peasant of Savoy, while ploughing his fields in the autumn of 1914, saw his wife crossing to him with the local postman, who had a letter in his hands. He took it from them, and put on his spectacles, and read that his two sons had been killed in an engagement in the Vosges. He said quietly, "God has found them ready," and then, slowly, "My poor wife!" and he returned to his

yoke of oxen. It would seem that the French accepted, without reserve and without difficulty, an inward discipline for which the world had formed little conception of their readiness. There is no question now, since all the private letters and diaries prove it, that the generation which had just left college, and had hardly yet gone out into the world, had formed, unsuspected by their elders, a conception of life which might have been called fatalistic if it had not been so rigorously regulated by a sense of duty. They were singularly calm under a constant presentiment of death. When the war came, they accepted the fiery trial not merely with resignation, but even with relief. Their athletic stoicism took what fortune offered them, instead of attempting to rebel against it. Their sentiment was that a difficulty had been settled. Life had been producing upon their consciences a sense of complication, a tangle of too many problems. Now they might, and did, cheerfully relinquish the effort to solve them. One of the most extraordinary features of the moral history of the young French officers in this war has been the abandonment of their will to the grace of God and the orders of the chief. In the letters of the three noble brothers Belmont, who fell in rapid succession, this apprenticeship to sacrifice is remarkable, but it recurs in all the records. "God found them ready!"

When all is of so inspired an order of feeling, it is difficult, it is even invidious, to select. But the figure of Paul Lintier, whose journals have been

piously collected by M. Edmond Haraucourt, stands out before us with at least as much saliency as any other. We may take him as a peculiarly lucent example of his illuminated class. Quartermaster Lintier died on March 15, 1916, struck by a shell, on the Lorraine frontier, at a place called Jeandelincourt. He had not yet completed his twenty-third year, for he was born at Mayenne on May 13, 1893. In considering the cases of many of these brilliant and sympathetic young French officers, who had already published or have left behind them works in verse and prose, there may be a disposition, in the wonderful light of their experience, to exaggerate the positive value of their productions. Not all of them, of course, have contributed, or would have contributed, durable additions to the store of the literature of France. We see them, excusably, in the rose-light of their sunset. But, for this very reason, we are inclined to give the closer attention to Paul Lintier, who not only promised well but adequately fulfilled that promise. It seems hardly too much to say that the revelation of a prose-writer of the first class was brought to the world by the news of his death.

His early training predicted nothing of romance. He was intended for a career in commerce, but, showing no aptitude for trade, he dallied with legal studies at Lyons, and "commenced author" by publishing some essays in that city. At the age of twenty he joined a regiment of artillery, and seems to have perceived, a year before the war,

that the only profession he was fitted for was soldiering. Towards the close of September 1914, in circumstances which he recounts in his book, he was severely wounded; he went back to the front in July 1915, and, as we have said, fell fighting eight months later. This is the history of a young man who will doubtless live in the annals of French literature; and brief as it seems, it is really briefer still, since all we know of Paul Lintier, or are likely ever to know, is what he tells us himself in describing what he saw and practised and endured between August 1 and September 22, 1914. This wonderful book, "Ma Pièce," was written by the young gunner, night after night, on his knee, during seven weeks of inconceivable intensity of emotion, and it is by this revelation of his genius that his memory will be preserved.

The style of Paul Lintier is one of the miracles of art. There is no evidence that this youth had studied much or had devoted himself to any of the training which adequate expression commonly demands. We know nothing about him until he suddenly bursts upon us, in the turmoil of mobilization, as a finished author. What strikes a critical reader of "Ma Pièce," as distinguishing it from other works of its class, is a certain intellectual firmness most remarkable in a lad of Lintier's age, suddenly confronted by such a frenzy of public action. There is no pessimism, and no rhetoric, and no touch of humour, but an obsession for the truth. This is displayed by another and an ex-

tremely popular recent publication, "En Campagne," by M. Marcel Dupont, which exhibits exactly the same determination to exaggerate nothing and to reduce nothing, but to report exactly what the author saw with his own eyes, in that little corner of the prodigious battle-field in which his own regiment was fighting. Truth, the simple unvarnished truth, has been the object of these various writers in setting down their impressions, but the result exemplifies the difference between what is, and what is not, durable as literature. For this purpose, it is well to turn from Lintier's pages to those of the honest writers of whom Dupont is the type, and then back again to Lintier. All evoke, through intense emotion, most moving and most tragic sensations, but Lintier, gifted with some inscrutable magic, evokes them in the atmosphere of beauty.

A quality of the mind of Paul Lintier which marked him out for a place above his fellows was the prodigious exactitude of his memory. This was not merely visual, but emotional as well. Not only did it retain, with the precision of a photograph, all the little fleeting details of the confused and hurried hours in which the war began, but it kept a minute record of the oscillation of feeling. Those readers who take a pleasure in the technical parts of writing may enjoy an analysis of certain pages in "Ma Pièce," for instance, the wonderful description of an *alerte* at 2 A.M. above the village of Tailly-sur-Meuse (pp. 131, 132). With the

vigorous picturesqueness of these sentences we may compare the pensive quality and the solidity of touch which combine to form such a passage as the following account of a watch at Azannes (August 14, 1914) :—

" La nuit est claire, rayée par les feux des projecteurs de Verdun qui font des barres d'or dans le ciel; merveilleuse nuit de mi-août, infiniment constellée, égayée d'étoiles filantes qui laissent après elles de longues phosphorescences.

" La lune s'est levée. Elle perce mal les feuillages denses des pruniers et le cantonnement immobile reste sombre. Çà et là, seulement, elle fait des taches jaunes sur l'herbe et sur les croupes des chevaux qui dorment debout. Le camarade avec qui je partage cette nuit de garde est étendu dans son manteau au pied d'un grand poirier. Devant moi, la lune illumine la plaine. Les prairies sont voilées de gaze blanche. Les deux armées, tous feux éteints, dorment ou se guettent."

Lintier has no disposition to make things out better than they were. His account of the defeat at Virton, on August 22, is grave and calm in its sad stoicism, it is even harsh in its refusal to overlook any of the distressing features of the affair. But hope rises in his heart like clear water in a troubled well, and it is just after this melancholy set-back that the noble French spirit most vividly asserts itself. In the very forefront of physical and moral misery, " quelle émouvante compréhension de la Patrie s'est révélée à nous ! " An army

which is instantly and completely victorious can never experience the depth of this sentiment. It is necessary to have fought, to have suffered, to have feared (if only for a moment) that all was lost, in order to comprehend with passion what the mother-country means to a man. Lying in the fog, soaked with rain, at the edge of the copses from which the German guns had ejected them, it was at that wretched moment that the full apprehension came to Paul Lintier that France comprised for him all the charm of life, all the affections, all the joys of the eyes and the heart and the brain. "Alors, on préfère tomber, mourir là, parce qu'on sent que la France perdue, ce serait pire que la mort." This is a feeling which animates the darkest pages of his book—and many of them perforce are gloomy; through all the confusion and doubt, the disquietude, the physical dejection, the sense of a kind of blind-man's buff intolerably wearisome and fatiguing—through all this, which the young author does not seek to conceal, there runs the ceaseless bright thread of hope sustained by love.

For us English the book has a curious interest in its unlikeness to anything which an English lad of twenty would have dreamed of writing. It strikes an English reader, in comparison with the equally gallant and hardly less picturesque records which some of our own young officers have produced, as extraordinarily "grown up." The new generation which France sent into the war of defence was more simple and more ardent at the outset

than our own analogous generation was. It was less *dilettante* and more intellectual. The evidences of thought, of reasoned reflection carried out to its full extent, of an adequate realization of the problems presented by life, are manifest, though in various degree, in all these records of French officers killed in the months which preceded Christmas 1914. These Frenchmen did not go out light-heartedly, nor with a pathetic inability to fathom the purpose for which they so generously went, but they had given the matter a study which seemed beyond their years. They marched to the blood-baths of Belgium and Lorraine with solemnity, as though to a sacrament.

It must be remarked as an interesting point that this generation had recovered a sense of the spirituality of a war of national defence. In simpler words, it had recovered that honest pride which France, in certain of its manifestations since the war of 1870, seemed to have lamentably lost. Posterity will compare the serene simplicity of Péguy and Lintier with the restlessness and bitter disenchantment of the 1880 generation, which arrived at manhood just when France was most deeply conscious of her humiliation. If we seek for the sources of this recovery of self-respect, which so beautifully characterized French character at the immediate crisis of 1914, we have to find it, of course, in the essential elasticity of the trained French mind. The Frenchman likes the heroic attitude, which is unwelcome to us, and he adopts it instinc-

tively, with none of our national shyness and false modesty. But, if we seek for a starting-point of influence, we may probably find it in the writings of a soldier whose name is scarcely known in England, but whose "Études sur le Combat," first published in 1880, have been the text-book of the young French officer, and were never being so much read as just before the outbreak of the war.

The author of these "Études sur le Combat" was Colonel Ardent du Picq, who fell at the battle of Longeville-lès-Metz, on August 15, 1870. He had predicted the calamity of that war, which he attributed to the mental decadence of the French army, and to the absence of any adequate General Staff organization. Ardent du Picq had received no encouragement from within or from without, and the reforms which he never ceased to advocate were treated as the dreams of an eccentric idealist. He died, unrecognized, without having lived to see carried out one of the reforms which he had so persistently advocated. His tongue was rough and his pen was dipped in acid; the military critic who ridiculed the "buffooneries" of his generals and charged his fellow-officers with trying to get through their day's work with as little trouble to themselves as possible, was not likely to carry much weight at the close of the Second Empire. But the scattered papers of the forgotten Colonel Ardent du Picq were preserved, and ten years after his death a portion of them was published. Every scrap which could be found of the work of so fruitful a

military thinker was presently called for, and at the moment of the outbreak of the present war the "Études sur le Combat" had become the text-book of every punctilious young officer. It is still unknown how much of the magnificent effort of 1914 was not due to the shade of Ardent du Picq.

Although the name of that author does not occur in the pages of "Ma Pièce," we are constrained to believe that Lintier had been, like so many young men of his class, an infatuated student of the "Études." He had comprehended the essence of military vitality and the secret of military grandeur. He had perceived the paramount importance of moral force in contending with formidable hostile organizations. Ardent du Picq, who possessed the skill of his nation in the manufacture of maxims, laid it down that "Vaincre, c'est d'être sûr de la victoire." He assented to the statement that it was a spiritual and not a mechanical ascendancy which had gained battles in the past and must gain them in the future. Very interesting it is to note, in the delicately scrupulous record of the mind and conscience of Paul Lintier, how, side by side with this uplifted patriotic confidence, the weakness of the flesh makes itself felt. At Tailly, full of the hope of coming battle, waiting in the moonlit forest for the sound of approaching German guns, suddenly the heroism drops from him, and he murmurs the plaintive verses of the old poet Joachim du Bellay to the echo of "Et je mourrai peut-être demain!" The delicate sureness with

which he notes these changes of mood is admirable; and quickly the depression passes: "vite notre extraordinaire insouciance l'emporte, et puis, jamais heure a-t-elle été plus favorable à la revanche?"

In defining the particular principles which have actuated the magnificent French General Staff in the present crisis, Lord Haldane has dwelt on the fact that the French have displayed throughout "that moral effect which comes from certainty of purpose and which only concentrated thought can give." The value which the higher authority sets on the cultivation of moral enthusiasm is exemplified by the fact that the French Ministry of War has encouraged the publication of those personal records, from which we have here made a selection, on the ground that they carry throughout the army a contagion of energy and courage. We are far here from the obscure jealousy of thought which made a military representative of the British War Office the other day lay down the brilliant axiom "A hairdresser is of more value to the country at war than a librarian!" Such a man could not exist in a French community, where, at the very height of hostilities, so prominent a military authority as Colonel Émile Manceau could pause to say, "Let us read, let us give much time to reading!" It is a curious reflection that the present struggle has been, for the French, the most literary of all wars, the one in which the ordered expression of clear thought in language has been most carefully and consciously cultivated.

This was very far from being the case with the war of 1870, when the absence of literature was strongly felt during and after the crisis. The old satirist of the "Iambes," Auguste Barbier, wrote, immediately after the declaration of peace, a poem in which he rehearsed the incidents of the war, and commented on the absence from the list of its victims of a single distinguished writer. He said—

"La Muse n'a pas vu tomber un seul poète,"

and it was out of any one's power to refute the sinister and prosaic verse. The contrast with 1914 is painful and striking. In the existing war the holocaust of victims, poets and historians, painters and sculptors, musicians and architects, has been heartrending, and it can never in future years be pretended that the Muses have this time spared us their most poignant sacrifices. A year ago the *Revue Critique*, one of the most serious and original of the learned journals of Paris, announced the losses it had endured. It was conducted by a staff of forty scholars; by the summer of 1916 this number was reduced by twenty-seven; thirteen had been killed, eleven severely wounded, three had disappeared.

Many writers have asked, and M. Maurice Barrès prominently among them, what is the reason of the fact that intelligence has taken a front place in this war? What has been the source of the spirit of self-immolation which has driven the intellectual and imaginative section of French

youth to hold out both hands to catch the full downpour of the rain of death? There is no precedent for it in French history, and we may observe for ourselves how new a thing it was, and how unexpected, by comparing with the ardent and radiant letters and poems of the youngest generation the most patriotic expressions of their elders. A single example may suffice. No man of letters has given a nobler witness to the truth of his patriotism than Colonel Patrice Mahon, known in letters as Art Roë. His novels, which dealt largely with modern Russian life, in relation with the French army, were virile and elevated productions, but he was a man of fifty at the time of his heroic death at the head of his troops, in the battle of Wisembach (August 22, 1914), and his tone was not that of such young men as Camille Violand and Marcel Drouët. To read again the "Pingot et moi" of Art Roë is to return to a book of the utmost sincerity and valour, but it was published in 1893, and there is no touch of the splendour of 1914 about it.

A figure which stands midway between the generation of Art Roë and that of the adolescent comrades of a new Sophocles of whom we shall presently speak, is Captain E. J. Détanger, who seems to be transitional, and to share the qualities of both. This name has, even now, scarcely grown familiar to the eye and ear, but it proves to have been the real name of Émile Nolly, whose romances of modern life in the Extreme East had been widely

read just before the war. Nolly's earliest books, "Hien le Maboul" and "La Barque Annamite" (but particularly the latter), gave promise of a new Pierre Loti or a new Rudyard Kipling, but totally distinct in manner from both. Détanger was just thirty-four when the war broke out, and he was one of its early victims, dying at Blainville-sur-l'Eau on September 5. He greatly distinguished himself by his personal bravery, and the cross of the Legion of Honour was pinned to his blood-stained uniform on his last battle-field. The tribute of a fellow-officer to this devoted man of letters may be quoted here. It is an example of the sudden and complete transformation which turned artists into soldiers at the first sound of the bugle :—

"Émile Nolly proved a magnificent soldier. He had a youthful, blithe, fervent and resolute soul; he had the soul of a hero completely prepared to sacrifice himself with joy for his country. After having served valiantly and brilliantly in Indo-China, and then in Morocco, it was with a radiant hope that he set out for the frontier of Lorraine. 'What does the life of any one of us matter?' he said to me just before he left. 'All that is essential is that France should live, that she should be victorious.'"

Marcel Drouët, who has just been mentioned, was much younger. He was a native of the invaded department of the Ardennes, and had not completed his twenty-sixth year when he was killed in the trenches of Consenvoye, in the Woëvre, when

he was taking part in the outer defence of Verdun. He seems to have been distinguished by a refinement of spirit, which is referred to, in different terms, by every one who has described him. He leaves behind him a volume of poems, "L'Ombre qui tourne," and various essays and fragments. The journal of the last days of his life has been edited by M. Maurice Barrès, and is a record of singular delicacy and courage. We see him facing the dreadful circumstances of the war, made the more dreadful to him because the horrors are committed in the midst of the familiar scenes of his own home, and we find him patiently waiting for the signal to lead his men into action while he holds a volume of Chateaubriand open upon his knee. The reflections of Marcel Drouët differ in some respects from those of his most enthusiastic companions. There is a note of tenderness in them which is unusual, and which is very pathetic. At the very close of his brief and heroic life, the thoughts of Drouët reverted to the historic town in which he was born, to Sedan which still shuddered in his infancy at the recollection of the horrors of 1870. He thought of the dead who fell on that melancholy field; and then his thoughts turned to those dear faces which he had so recently left behind. The following passage, in its simplicity, in its sweetness, deserves to live in the memorial literature of the war :—

"Je pense à vous, mes chers vivants, aux mains des barbares en ce moment sans doute, mais en le

cœur de qui j'ai foi, tant je connais votre dévouement aux choses sublimes.

" Mais aussi je pense à vous, mon Dieu, qui avez voulu toutes ces choses pour votre plus grand gloire et pour l'établissement de votre justice. Tous ces malheurs, ces tristesses, tout ce sang répandu sont imposés par vous, mon Dieu, en manière de rédemption. Mais votre soleil glorieux éclairera bientôt, j'en suis absolument certain, la victoire du bon droit qui attend depuis près d'un demi-siècle. J'y co-opère de toutes mes forces, de toute mon âme. Et si vous me retirez de ce monde, ô Dieu de bonté, permettez que ce soit pour me joindre à ceux qui m'ont précédé dans votre séjour, et dont l'affection terrestre me fut précieuse. C'est toute la prière ardente que je fais devant le soleil levant, ce jour de Toussaint que sillonnent déjà les obus semeurs de mort, en cette année 1914 qui verra rétablir la paix du monde, par l'anéantissement du peuple barbare, et la régénérescence de la nation française."

In most cases there rests an obscurity over the brief lives of these gallant young officer-authors, whose nature was little observed until the flash of battle illuminated them for one last brilliant moment. We feel a strong desire, which cannot be gratified, to follow them from their childhood to their adolescence, and to see for ourselves what impulses directed them into the path of heroism. It is rarely that we can do this, but one of these poets has left behind him two friends who have recaptured the faint and shrouded impressions of his early life. The piety

of M. Henri Albert Besnard, who was his intimate companion, and of that practised narrator M. Henri Bordeaux, who is his biographer, enable us to form a clearer and fuller conception of Camille Violand than of any of his compeers. Born in 1891, he was typical of that latest generation of which we have spoken, in whom all seemed to be unconsciously preparing for the great and critical sacrifice. He was born at Lyons, but was brought up in the Quercy, that wild and tortured district just north of the Pyrenees, where nature seems to gather together all that she possesses of the grotesque and violent in landscape; but he was educated at Alençon, and trained at Vouziers, in the midst of the orchards of Normandy. Thus both sides of France, the Midi and the Manche, were equally known to him, but the ceaseless peregrinations which he underwent, so far from enlarging his horizon, seem to have plunged his soul in melancholy. At the age of twenty he struck M. Bordeaux as being the typical *déraciné*.

The letters of Camille Violand and the memories of his friends present to us the record of a vague and uneasy boyhood. He began quite early to exercise his mind in prose and verse, but without energy or aim. He was not fixed in any plan of life. His letters—for he wrote with abundance, and something undefined seems to have induced his family to keep his letters—are steeped in sombre and objectless melancholy. He was tormented by presentiments of misfortune; he indulged a kind

of romantic valetudinarianism. In the confusion of his spirit as he passed uneasily from boyhood into manhood, the principal moral quality we perceive is a peevish irritation at the slow development of life. He was just twenty-one when the death of his mother, to whom he was passionately attached, woke him out of this paralyzed condition, and it is remarkable that, in breaking, like a moth from a chrysalis, out of his network of futile and sterile sophisms, it was immediately on the contingency of war that he fixed his thoughts. The news of his mother's death, by a strange and rapid connexion of ideas, reminded him of his future responsibility as an officer in the coming struggle. He wrote, in 1913, " Je m'effraie en pensant à cette responsabilité qui pèsera certainement un jour sur moi, car je considère la guerre comme à peu près certaine à bref délai."

Having once formed this conviction, a complete revolution affected the character of the young Violand. His melancholy ceased; his uncertainty fell from him; it seemed as though his soul threw off her fetters. From the close of 1913, when the chancelleries of Europe were still profoundly unconscious of the tremendous upheaval which was in store for them, this young man, hitherto so timorous and irresolute, is seen to be filled with a species of prophetic ecstasy :—

> *" The boundless, overflowing, bursting gladness !*
> *The vaporous exultation not to be confined !*
> *. . . the animation of delight*
> *Which wraps me, like an atmosphere of light,*
> *And bears me as a cloud is borne by its own wind."*

This remarkable change of character was encouraged by the military discipline which now regulated his life, and which he accepted with rapture and devotion. His mother's one aim had been to make of Camille a soldier and a Christian, and he became the very type of that combination.

To use a striking phrase of M. Henri Bordeaux, the war found Camille Violand in a state of preparedness. He saw it arrive, not with anxiety or trepidation, but with solemn joy. His father was placed in command of a brigade of dragoons, and he himself, at another part of the frontier line, was given the rank of second lieutenant and a command which filled him with the pride of responsibility. Three weeks later he was wounded in the head at the battle of Virton, but not until he had seen the Germans, after a hard fight, retire before the attack of his men. "Il a connu l'ivresse de la victoire : il a vu fuir l'ennemi"—so a friend announced it. He was taken back to the hospital at Limoges, but the victory of the Marne intoxicated him, and it was found impossible to hold him back. With a head still bandaged, he made his appearance once more in his beloved regiment, which was now fighting in the forest of the Argonne, but on the first occasion on which he led his men, Violand was wounded again, now in the shoulder. He was sent far back, into Brittany, to Quimper, where, a second time, by a subterfuge he contrived to escape from the hospital before his wound was properly healed. He was absolutely intractable in his determination

to get back promptly to the fighting line : " il était comme ça, avec son air délicat et tranquille ! " Again brought back, he was set to training men at Quimper. But he could not endure the restraint, and his nerves broke down.

It was found impossible to hold him back, and on October 8 the military authorities consented to his return to his regiment, and with the permission was combined the news that he had been nominated for the cross of the Legion of Honour. The letter in which he announces that fact to the ladies at home—" mes chères Grand'mère et Tante "—is charming in its simplicity. " La croix gagnée sur un champ de bataille, c'est à mes yeux le plus beau rêve qu'un jeune Français pût faire ; je regrette seulement de ne pas l'avoir méritée davantage ; mais l'avenir me permettra, j'espère, de justifier cette récompense, que je considère comme anticipée." The official notification specifies the wounds which he had received and the fact that, by the testimony of all who saw him under fire, the young lieutenant gave evidence of very great courage and of indomitable energy. That he was, by what he calls a queer coincidence, the youngest officer of his regiment and its only member of the Legion of Honour, afforded him an unaffected satisfaction.

From this time—the end of October 1914—the letters of Camile Violand testify to the rapid development of his mind and character. He loses a certain childishness which had hitherto clung to him, and he expresses himself with a more virile sobriety.

Nothing could exceed the pathos of his pictures of the terrible life in the Argonne, and we are made to feel how rapidly the suffering and the responsibility of his military life were bringing out all the deepest and most serious elements in his character. There is a remarkable letter of January 7, 1915, describing an engagement in which he lost several of his best men, and in particular an experienced corporal in whose skill he much confided. The briefest fragment broken from this pathetic description, addressed to his father, will give a notion of the tone of it :—

" J'étais absorbé par les blessés dans mon poste de commandement et quand je pus me rendre dans la tranchée où il était, il tombait dans le coma. Ses derniers mots avaient été : ' Adieu, ma Patrie ! ' Pourtant, il me reconnut à la voix, me répondit faiblement. Je l'assistai dans ses derniers moments. Ce fut bien rapide, bien simple et bien beau. *J'étais pour lui le chef, ce qui est plus que le Père et le Prêtre réunis.* Je l'ai bien senti là ; quand ce fut presque fini, je l'embrassai et le quittai pour retourner aux soucis que nous donne l'ennemi."

Thus was this lad of three-and-twenty fortified and ripened by the arduous warfare in the Argonne. He was now spending what leisure the fighting gave him in a careful study of Homer. We gather that he had just finished re-reading the " Iliad " when the end came. On March 4, 1915, at Mesnil-lès-Hurlus, a ball pierced his heart, splintering in its passage the cross of the Legion of Honour of which

he was so proud. In his pocket was found his last letter, still unposted, in which he told his father of a fresh distinction for valour which he had just received, and in the course of which, with a manifest presentiment of his approaching end, he wrote, " Je mourrai, si Dieu veut, en bon chrétien et en bon Français."

It is not to be denied that ordinary observers were not in any degree prepared for the heroic devotion displayed by such young officers as these at the beginning of the war. The general opinion in peace time was expressed by M. Maurice Maeterlinck when he laid it down that " courage, moral and physical endurance (if not abnegation, forgetfulness of self, renunciation of all comfort, the faculty of sacrifice, the power to face death) belong exclusively to the most primitive, the least happy, the least intelligent of peoples, those which are least capable of reasoning, of taking danger into account." It was the common hypothesis among moralists that, as men's nerves grew more sensitive and the means of destruction more cruel and irresistible, no human being would be able to support the strain of actual fighting. It seemed inevitable that soldiers would rapidly become demoralized, when exposed to the multifarious horrors of modern mechanical battle. Nothing, therefore, could have been more surprising than the temper shown by thousands of young men, suddenly called up from sedentary and safe pursuits, and confronted by the terrors of shrapnel and liquid fire and mines

and gas, and all the other horrible ingenuities of an unseen enemy for killing and mutilating. Their imaginations were unaccustomed to these terrors, it is true, but the higher faculties of the human mind asserted themselves, and in the vague collective battle of the trenches these young French officers, despite the refinement and the security in which they had always been acustomed to exist, instantly reverted to the chivalrous attitude which their remote ancestors had adopted in a warfare that was romantic and personal in its individualism.

No doubt a not inconsiderable part of the serenity, which is so remarkably evident in the letters and journals of these young men, was due to the fact that they had arrived, for the first time, at a comprehension of the unity of life. There is no tedious alternative of choice in the active military career. All is regulated, all is arranged in accordance with a hierarchical discipline, and war becomes what dogmatic religion is to a weak soul that has been tossed about by the waves of doubt. It must be also borne in mind that the incessant dread of invasion, especially in the neighbourhood of the eastern frontier, had kept the spirits of those who knew that responsibility would fall upon them, in a state of unceasing agitation. It is a paralyzing thing to exist under a perpetual menace which nothing can precipitate and yet nothing can avert. Captain Belmont, in his admirable letters, speaks much of the " romanticism " which attracted many of his companions, and of the natural satisfaction

which the declaration of war gave to their restless faculties. The two sentiments were probably one and the same, and to a poetical temperament that might well seem "romantic" which filled a less vivid mind with restlessness and languor.

It is noticeable, too, that when once the sickening suspense was removed, and the path of pain and glory lay clear before these youthful spirits, they grew very rapidly in intellectual stature. They had found their equilibrium, and no more time and force were wasted in useless oscillations. Each of them had, at last, the occasion, and therefore the power, to fill out the lines of his proper individuality. As M. Henri Bordeaux excellently says, "L'esprit inquiet ne se contente de rien, le cœur inapaisé se croit incompris." But now these men knew their vocation, and a precocious experience of life developed in them a temper of meditation. It is extraordinary what an intelligent philosophy, what a delicate study of nature, were revealed at once in the writings of these heroic boys of twenty. Lieutenant Belmont, who fought in Alsace, had spent his infancy and adolescence in the neighbourhood of Grenoble, and his memory was full of the rich Dauphiné valley, with its great river and its eastern horizon of the Alps. In the misery of the September nights of 1914, in the harshness of misty mornings among the Alsatian pines, his thoughts return to the luminous twilights of his old home under the great oaks of the Isère, and he expresses his nostalgia in terms of the most exquisite and the

most unstudied grace. Here is a fragment of one of his letters home (October 1914) :—

"Les journées sont exquises, tristes et pâles, également différentes des crudités de nos idées et des ténèbres de l'hiver. L'imagination a vite fait de s'envoler, à travers cette lumière adoucie, vers tous les horizons familiers de la petite patrie, vers la vallée de Grenoble, paresseusement allongée dans ce bain de léger soleil, au pied des Alpes déjà engourdies, vers les terres rousses de Lonnes longées par les futaies jaunissantes où s'abritent les gibiers, tranquilles cette année."

No doubt, the reason why this war has been, for France, so peculiarly a literary war, is that the mechanical life in the trenches, alternately so violent and so sedentary, has greatly enforced the habit of sustained contemplation based on a vivid and tragic experience. This has encouraged, and in many instances positively created, a craving for literary expression, which has found abundant opportunity for its exercise in letters, journals, and poems; and what it has particularly developed is a form of literary art in which Frenchmen above all other races have always excelled, that analysis of feeling which has been defined as "le travail de ciselure morale." This moral carved-work, or chasing, as of a precious metal, revealing the rarity and value of spiritual surfaces, is characteristic of the journals of Paul Lintier, of the beauty of which we have already spoken. His art expends itself in the effect of outward things on the soul. He

speaks of mysterious sights, half-witnessed in the gloaming, of sinister noises which have to be left unexplained. He does not shrink from a record of unlovely things, of those evil thoughts which attend upon the rancour of defeat, of the suspicion of treason which comes to dejected armies like a breath of poison-gas. That portion of his "Souvenirs" which deals with the days of the retreat on Paris is written in a spasm of savage anger; a whole new temper is instantly revealed when once the tide turns at Nanteuil. Nature herself thus endorses his new mood, as he writes "There are still clouds heaped up to the west, but the blue, that cheers us, is chasing them all away."

Among the noble young poets whose pathetic and admirable fragments the piety of surviving friends has preserved, it is difficult to select one name rather than another. But in the rank of these Rupert Brookes and Julian Grenfells and Charles Listers of France, we may perhaps pause before the ardent figure of Jacques de Choudens. He was a Breton, and was trained for the law on the other side of France, at Lille. He found that the call of the sea was irresistible, and after two years at a desk in that dreary and dusty city, he suddenly flung up his cap and would have no more of such drudgery. To the despair of his family, he started on the high seas, and explored the wonderland of Haiti. After various adventures, he was about to return to France, when the sea again took him by the throat, and he vanished, like Robert

Louis Stevenson, in the Pacific. Having sailed twice round the world, "beyond the sunset and the baths of all the western stars," a tired Ulysses under thirty, Jacques de Choudens had just come back to France when the war seized him with a fresh and deep enchantment. He entered into it with a profound ardour, and proved himself to possess exceptional military qualities. He was severely wounded on the second day of the battle of Charleroi, but slowly recovered, only to be killed in an engagement on June 13, 1915. His poems, written since war broke out, have been carefully collected and published by his friend, M. Charles Torquet. They are few, and they suffer from a certain hardness of touch; Jacques de Choudens had, as yet, a deeper acquaintance with life than with literature; but they breathe a spirit of high and romantic heroism. Let the sonnet called "Autre Prière" be offered as an example :—

"Terres, fleuves, forêts, ô puissances occultes,
C'est votre âme qui bat au bleu de nos poignets ;
Notre orgueil s'est enfin cabré sous les insultes
Dont, depuis quarante ans, ô France, tu saignais.

Dans le livre où s'apprend le plus hautain des cultes,
Marque la page avec nos sabres pour signets ;
Ceins la couronne d'or qu'en l'An deux tu ceignais,
Car c'est dans notre chair à nous que tu la sculptes.

France ! France ! Bénis chaque arme et chaque front ;
C'est d'ardeur, non de peur, que tremble l'éperon.
Nous sommes tes martyrs volontaires, superbes,

Sous l'auréole d'or des galons du képi. . . .
Nous allons préparer aux faucilles des gerbes,
Puisqu'où tombe un soldat pousse un nouvel épi."

The poet, shortly before he fell, wrote to a friend "Nous travaillerons mieux après la victoire, ce que nous ferons ayant été mûri par la fatigue et les angoisses. La vie est bonne et belle et la guerre est une chose bien amusante." This is the type of Frenchman who fights for the love of fighting, who puts above all other happiness the prize of military honour and glory won in a good cause. We meet with it in the lyrical effusion of an adventurous poet like Jacques de Choudens and in the straightforward evidence of a practised soldier like Captain Hassler, whose "Ma Campagne" is a record extraordinary alike for its courage, for its vivacity, and for its modesty.

The peculiar spirit of ardent gallantry to which we have dedicated these few pages is illustrated, as will be observed, by examples taken without exception from the first months of the war. It would be rash to say, without a careful sifting of evidence, how much of this sentiment survived the days which preceded the battle of the Marne. France has, in the succession of her attacks up to the present hour, continued and confirmed the magnificent tradition of her courage. But it is impossible to overlook the elements which have taken the romantic colour out of the struggle. No chivalry could survive close experience of the vile and bestial cruelty of German methods. The sad and squalid aspects of a war of resistance, fought in the very bleeding flesh of the beloved mother-country, were bound to be fatal to "cette bonne

humeur bienfaisante" which so marvellously characterized the young French officers of August 1914. Moreover, the mere physical element of fatigue has been enough to quench that first radiant flame. We find it deadening, at last, even the high spirit of Paul Lintier, and we listen to his confession: "To sleep! to sleep! O to live without a thought, in absolute silence. To live, after having so often nearly died. I could sleep for days, and days, and days!"

These are considerations which belong to a heavier and a wearier time. As a matter of history—so that in our hurrying times a gesture of so much beauty may not, because it was so ephemeral, be forgotten—I have endeavoured to catch a reflection of the glow which blazed in the hearts of young intellectual officers at the very beginning of the war. If in the inevitable wear and tear of the interminable struggle, this beauty fades into the light of common day, so much the more is there need that we should fix it in memory, since in a world which savagery and treason have made so hideous, we cannot afford to let this jewel of pure moral beauty be trampled into oblivion.

breve et irreparabile tempus
Omnibus est vitæ; sed famam extendere facti,
Hoc virtutis opus.

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THE writings of La Rochefoucauld were subjected to accurate and detailed examination in the edition begun by Gilbert in 1868, and brought to a pause at his untimely death in 1870. It was completed in 1883 by J. Gourdault. After the lapse of half a century, the short biography by Gilbert, with which this edition began, naturally requires some revision, and is open to several additions. An earlier volume (1863), by E. de Barthélemy, is of a more technical character, but may be referred to with advantage by those curious regarding detail. The MSS. of Rochefoucauld still in existence—one of these, known as the Liancourt MS., is in the Duke's handwriting—are numerous, and may still, no doubt, reward investigation. The best recent summary is that by J. Bourdeau (1895), published in M. Jusserand's charming series. There is not, so far as I am aware, any English biography of the author of the "Maximes."

The complete works of La Bruyère were elaborately edited in three volumes (1865–1878) by G. Servois. Much curious information is to be found in Allaire's "La Bruyère dans la Maison de Condé" (1887), and an excellent summary in the Life by M. Paul Morillot, 1904. But the latest and fullest account of La Bruyère's career is to be found in M. Emile Magne's Preface to the selected works (1914). Editions of "Les Caractères" are countless.

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